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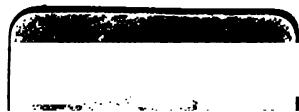
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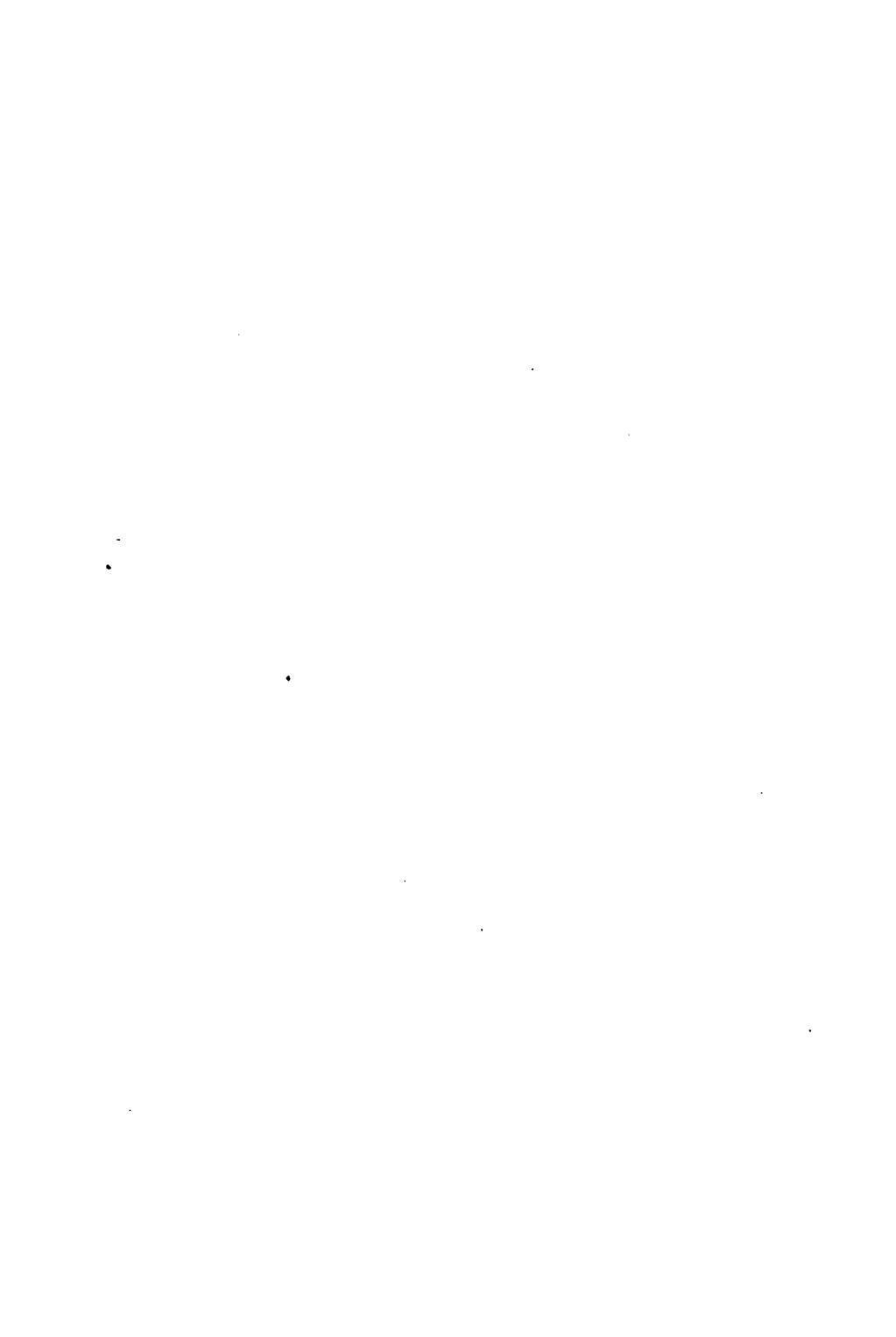


BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE ROSE GARDEN'



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CARTOUCHE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE ROSE GARDEN' 'UNAWARES' &c.

'ONLY A DOG'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1878

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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.



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CARTOUCHE.

CHAPTER I.

FOG.

THE change from Italy to London in the month of December, of all months in the year, is somewhat gloomy. It struck Ibbetson the more that he was greeted the morning after his arrival by a dense yellow fog, which came down chimneys and into people's throats in the persistent manner with which we are all familiar, but which is dolefully depressing to foreigners. Jack had somewhat of the feeling of a foreigner himself as the gas was turned on to enable him to eat

his breakfast in his lodgings—not having as yet effected the counterbalance of comfort versus climate, which a well-brought up and constitutional Englishman derives from his Club and his *Times*. That would come later in the day. Meanwhile, the fog was the reverse of cheerful, his lodging looked grimy, and his thoughts went flying back to the blue skies of Italy, and to people he had left there.

What was Phyllis doing, for instance, and why should he care to know? the young fellow thought, pushing his fingers through his crisp curly hair. Probably at that moment making plans for some excursions with those confounded Peningtons. What detestable bores people were who dragged others about in that ridiculous way, here, there, and everywhere, and how extraordinary it was that others should be found to submit! Here was he himself come on a wild goose

errand, if ever there were such a thing in the world, to look after a youngster, who from all accounts had rapidly developed into a scoundrel, and without the smallest idea what he was to do when he had got hold of him. Good heavens, what an idiot he had been! The only point on which he could fall back with satisfaction was that if he could do anything it would be a possible release for Bice, of whom he thought with great interest and compassion. Only on her account, he assured himself, had he undertaken the quixotic enterprise on the threshold of which he had arrived. Distinctly, only on her account.

He put himself into a hansom on the strength of this conviction, and drove to Clive's lodgings out in the Kensington direction. As he expected, the lad had gone to the City, but he heard the hour at which he was likely to return, and left a card with an explanatory line, saying that he would look

in that evening. Then he went to his chambers and began gathering up those odds and ends of life which so soon seem to detach themselves from us if for a moment we lay them down, and yet have a latent power of reproach when we meet them. There had been a little property of the first Lady Ibbetson's which her husband had made over to her son, on the occasion of his own second marriage, so that Jack had enough to live upon without troubling his head as to his profession. And then the idea of his marriage and the visions of Hetherston had somehow taken away the spur to work. This was at an end. In the foggy dinginess of his chambers he began to try to pull together some floating strands of ambition which had never had much more substance in them than a cobweb-like texture, and which now eluded his grasp. His nature was pre-eminently social. He could not

group his dreams round a central and solitary self. He wanted someone else to stimulate him with sympathy or fellow-interest. And, as he stood listlessly turning over a bundle of papers—why did the roar of London suddenly change to the rush of water, the splash of silver streams? Whose were those brown and stedfast eyes which he saw again looking into his? . . .

An exclamation escaped his lips. Then he turned up the gas, and sat down doggedly with the papers on his knees, and two or three big books by his side. His work might not be worth much, but he felt as if it served as a barricade against thoughts which were worthless.

He did not go out to Kensington again until half-past six or thereabouts, and as he rattled along through the muddy streets, he was the more convinced that his errand was not an agreeable one, and that it would

require delicate handling. A good deal must depend upon his first impression of Clive. If this were favourable, well and good ; and yet Jack was vaguely conscious that he had no great insight into character, and was apt to see no more than people were disposed to show him.

‘ Mr. Masters ? ’ Yes, Mr. Masters was at home, and a slipshod girl conducted him into a small room on the ground floor, smelling strongly of smoke, and brightly lit. A tall young man, who was sitting over the fire, came forward with a little shy awkwardness, which at once recalled Kitty to Ibbetson, and muttered something about being sorry he should have had the trouble of calling twice. Jack had an easy kindness of manner which generally put people at their ease, but this young fellow was as undoubtedly awkward as he was thin and dark, and though evidently interested in hearing news of his

family, it did not seem as if it would be within the bounds of possibility to get him to talk freely. Jack, himself, conscious that he was receiving very little that was definite in the way of those first impressions from which he had hoped so much, could hardly help smiling at his own discomfiture. Except the smoke, there was nothing in the room or about Clive himself to assist him in discoveries, and yet he had not come all the way from Rome for nothing.

‘There’s another link between us,’ he said pleasantly. ‘One of your heads, Mr. Thornton, is an uncle of mine.’

‘We don’t see much of him down at the office.’

‘No, perhaps not. But I suspect he looks sharply into things. Don’t you feel him in the background?’

‘I haven’t much to do with the heads,’ said the young fellow, looking uncomfortable.

‘Something pinches there,’ said Ibbetson inwardly, with his suspicions confirmed. Aloud he said, laughing ‘I’m not in Mr. Thornton’s best books at this present moment, but I might be able to give you an introduction—where do you go at Christmas?’

‘Nowhere. ‘I stay here.’

‘Gloomy work, isn’t it?’ said Jack, compassionately.

‘It doesn’t matter. I’d rather stop on here,’ said Clive, kicking a piece of coal.

‘Is your cousin in London—I mean Mr. Trent?’

‘Oliver Trent?’ glancing up in surprise. ‘Do you know him? Oh, you met him at the villa, I suppose. Yes, he is. At least I believe so. He and old—he and Mr. Thornton are very thick.’

‘He!’

‘Didn’t you know it?’

‘Not I. But perhaps that’s not to be wondered at. Still——’

There was a pause while Ibbetson was musing on this information. He was conscious that it aroused a vague uneasiness in his mind, and yet, what should make him uneasy? Phillis’s suspicions had not really touched him, and the half dislike which he at one time felt towards Trent had been as fleeting as other emotions of the same date. But there always remains the possibility that emotions may be revived.

Clive volunteered the next remark.

‘I never knew such a fellow as Oliver for knowing people. You can’t mention anybody but he can tell you all about them. And he seems to find out anything he pleases.’

It was the nearest approach to confidence that he had shown, and Jack followed it up with a plunge.

‘I tell you what it is, Masters,’ he said, looking hard at the fire so that Clive might not feel himself stared at, ‘your cousin has said something to your mother and sisters which has made them very uneasy about you. If he’d said more, it mightn’t have been so bad for them, but they know so little that they are fretting their lives out,’ pursued Ibbetson with a bold disregard for the truth which should certainly have been limited here by the third person singular. ‘I dare say you think I’ve no business to come poking my fingers into what doesn’t concern me, indeed to tell you the truth I’m of the same opinion myself. But I’m here because a friend of theirs for whom I’ve a regard is under the impression they’ve got an exaggerated idea of what is amiss, and thinks you might put things straighter. There! and I hope I’ve not made a bungle of it,’ he continued mentally, feeling as if the pause which

followed lasted five minutes at the very least.

‘I don’t see what Oliver can have said,’ said the young fellow a little sullenly. ‘I’ve followed his advice pretty closely.’

‘Well,’ Jack said slowly, ‘I suppose you’d hardly be disposed to take an outside opinion?’

‘Yours, you mean?’

His manner was not very pleasant, but Jack acknowledged that it was scarcely to be expected it should be different, and so far he had been unable to trace any symptom of fear as of one who held a guilty secret. He began to have a stronger conviction of his innocence himself.

‘Yes, I meant mine. One moment—I mean, of course, only on their account.’

‘Oliver is all the world with them,’ said Clive uneasily, ‘at least if one may trust half the messages he brings back.’

‘Why on earth don’t you write direct instead of trusting to messages?’

‘Direct? Why of course I do,’ said Clive staring blankly.

‘Well, openly then. Telling them of any—difficulties you may be in.’

‘I can’t see the good of worrying them about all the particulars when one has made a fool of oneself, but they know the outcome of it.’

Clive said this frankly and without hesitation. Jack became more and more doubtful how he was to go on. Even if you believe a fellow-man, you may be offering him the worst insult in your power by telling him so.

‘They fancy they don’t know, at any rate,’ he said rather lamely.

‘Not know! Why, haven’t they had Oliver out there? There was nothing to prevent their getting it all out of him. In

fact, he told me he had explained everything.'

'He certainly left them with the impression that there were circumstances you didn't wish made known.'

The young man started to his feet and flushed angrily red.

'I?'

'Yes.'

'There is nothing whatever. Nothing to conceal from them,' he added in a lower tone.

'Then a false impression has undoubtedly been given, and I advise you to set it right. By the way, when Miss Capponi wrote to ask the question, why didn't you explain?'

'Bice has never asked anything of the sort?' said Clive angrily, and yet uneasily.

'Are you certain? Just reflect. Last October it was.'

‘I tell you she has never done anything of the sort. Why on earth should she?’

Jack got up and put his hand on his shoulder.

‘I dare say it sounds queer to you, but I give you my word, I’m not asking from idle curiosity. Your sister *did* write to you last October. Look here, can you make up your mind to tell me your actual trouble? You owe money, I dare say. Much?’

‘Much to me,’ Clive said reluctantly. ‘I don’t know what you’d call it. Fifty pounds.’

‘And to whom?’

‘Oh, it’s all in Trent’s hands now. That’s one blessing.’

‘Is that all the difficulty?’ said Ibbetson. And this time he faced round and looked full at the other. Clive looked at him too, though distrustfully.

‘No,’ he said slowly. ‘But what there is besides, matters to no one.’

‘No trouble with the firm?’

Jack’s eyes were on him still, and he saw that he hesitated. But he said ‘No’ again. Then he broke out more eagerly.

‘I can’t explain it to you, for Oliver wouldn’t like it, and I’m under tremendous obligations to him. There’s nothing wrong, only I’ve met with very bad luck.’

‘Nothing wrong?’

‘No. That I’ll swear.’

‘Well,’ said Ibbetson, ‘perhaps I can’t expect you to say more to me. But at any rate your mother and sisters deserve all your confidence. Write to them fully.’

‘Oliver said it only bothered them, and that he would explain.’

‘He has made a mistake or two in the matter, it seems to me,’ said Ibbetson with so much concentrated anger in the tone that

Clive looked at him in surprise. But he recovered himself quickly and put out his hand, 'You'll write, that's understood. I'm going down to Hetherton, and will see you again when I come back.'

The interview had only been partly satisfactory. He felt sure that Clive had neither forged a cheque nor committed any other crime, and therefore Trent's black insinuations deserved all that Phyllis had thought of them. At the same time there was a depression about the young fellow which seemed to show that he was under some darker cloud than a debt of fifty pounds to a cousin. The more he thought of it, the more this conviction grew on him. Perhaps at Hetherton a light would be thrown upon it.

Before he had any chance of getting a hansom, he had to walk for some distance, and a thick wetting rain was falling. Lights were flashing and rolling through the fog,

the noise of wheels, the cry of newsmen, were the only distinct sounds which reached him out of that mighty roar which London sends forth day and night. Damp and prosaic enough it all was ; a beggar stretched forth a bony hand, the repulsiveness of face and figure unclothed by the picturesqueness which in the South might have softened its hideousness. Yet, as Jack splashed along, something within him seemed to leap into life as if in answer to a trumpet call. After all, it was his own country. He was young, strong, work had in it more of a joy than a burden. He felt as if he had been living of late in a fool's paradise of dreams, where he was of no good to himself or to anyone else, except, perhaps, to kind Miss Cartwright. He had rather prided himself upon an absence of ambition. But a consciousness of strength and a desire to use it seemed to awaken that evening, and, although he did

not own it, probably a wish that others—at any rate one other—should see that he, too, could *do*, awoke at the same time. Hether-ton had gone from him, but he felt as if other Hethertons lay beckoning to him from a blue distance, and though he smiled at his own airy castles, they had the power of enabling him to face the prospect of the actual place with perfect cheerfulness. He refused the first hansom that offered itself, feeling as if the walk home among all those other workers who were passing, coming and going, was a sort of pledge of brotherhood with them—given to himself. And he resolved to run down to Hether-ton to see what he could find out about Trent and Clive.

CHAPTER II.

JACK EXPRESSES AN OPINION.

IT was afternoon the next day before he left London, and past dark when he reached the Hetherton station. But the day had been fairly fine, and there was nothing in the evening to prevent his walking the two or three miles which lay between the station and the house, while his portmanteau was to come after him in the carrier's cart. He lingered a little, especially when he had crossed the sandy common and got down among the sturdy Scotch firs, so that, what with listening to the rustling of the wind in their tops, and the brawling of the swollen river, as he passed in at the lodge he heard

the little clock striking seven, the dinner hour at the Court.

Jack was a favourite with all the servants, and the old butler bustled out from the dining-room directly he heard who had arrived, and sent a young footman off with orders about the room.

‘You’ll like to wash your hands, Mr. John, and I’ll let master know you’re come.’

‘Anyone dining here, Jones?’

‘Only one gentleman, sir.’

There was no time for more. Jack went up the broad stairs, two or three at a time, and coming down more leisurely, walked into the dining-room and found himself face to face with Mr. and Mrs. Thornton and—Oliver Trent.

Jack would have been more discomposed had he not heard of this acquaintanceship from Clive, but as it was, the meeting annoyed him, and he did not trouble himself to

conceal the feeling. Oliver was prepared, and wore a passive countenance. Mr. Thornton, who liked Jack as well as, and his own will very much better than, he liked anybody, was divided between welcome and displeasure.

‘Upon my word, Jack, upon my word, you take us by surprise. Come for Christmas, eh? Well, fortunately a visitor more or less does not make much difference to Mrs. Thornton, and your room is no doubt ready. But a carriage should have met you if you had acquainted us. How did you come?’

‘I walked from the station, and my things were put into old Brook’s cart.’

He knew that Mr. Thornton hated old Brook’s cart, and there was partly a mischievous desire to tease him, and partly a wish to show Oliver Trent that he held very lightly the grandeur and riches of the Court.

Mrs. Thornton interposed. She was always interposing with kindly attempts to smooth down her husband, and an utter want of tact which made the smoothing produce the contrary effect.

‘How did you leave Phillis?’ she said.

‘*Why* did you leave her? would be more to the purpose,’ snorted Mr. Thornton, under his breath.

‘She was very well,’ said Jack, quietly helping himself to cucumber. ‘And as to why I came, it was on a little matter of business, and partly to look after a protégé or cousin of yours, Mr. Trent, unless I’m mistaken—Clive Masters.’

Oliver Trent’s face could not turn pale, but it changed to an indescribable shade of colour which answered the same purpose, and gave Ibbetson a moment of delight.

‘Masters?’ repeated Mr. Thornton.
‘Isn’t that the clerk you were speaking of?’

‘I presume it is,’ said Trent, recovering himself with an effort, ‘although I am at a loss to conceive how my interest for him and Mr. Ibbetson’s should run in an identical line?’

‘And I am afraid I cannot enlighten you,’ said Jack. ‘Perhaps they don’t. At any rate I can only answer for my own.’

There was a little silence. Oliver Trent had no desire to force explanations, and Mr. Thornton looked at the young fellow with a feeling which was partly pride and partly exasperation. He could never think that he impressed Jack as he would have liked to impress him, but the oddest part was that in his heart he envied his imperturbability, and the ease of manner to which he had never attained. Not that he was not a gentleman by birth. He was a new man in Surrey, but the Thorntons were a good old family, and he had a right to good manners and good

breeding ; perhaps it was that very fact which made him sore over the consciousness that he had neither. Money had been his aim in life, and he had an exaggerated respect for its value, but his pleasure in it was a good deal marred by his having sufficient acuteness to perceive when others held it in small account, and he could neither forgive them, nor in his heart of hearts help respecting them for their indifference. He got more dislike than was really his due. To Jack, both as man and boy, he had indeed been very kind, and yet Jack sometimes almost detested him. At this moment as he looked across the table, sparkling with silver and valuable glass, he wondered how Phillis had ever endured her life, and yet more how she had lived it and still preserved that simplicity and quiet self-possession to which his eyes had lately seemed to open. Mr. Thornton, with his bald head, insignificant features, and

pompous manner, looked to him more vulgar than ever. Evidently Oliver Trent was a favourite. Ibbetson said no more about Clive, but set himself with something like amusement to watch Trent's skilful treatment of his host. He deferred to him on all subjects, but not in any manner which should give the suspicion of open flattery, rather expressing at first a difference of opinion, and gradually allowing himself to be as it were convinced by Mr. Thornton's arguments. He showed, also, a delicate appreciation of wealth. Neither dinner nor wines were lost upon him, but his praise was discriminating, and implied reserve. Jack felt as if he were the spectator of some admirably played game of skill, the more so that Oliver took no pains to ingratiate himself with him, rather treating his comparative youth as something to be looked upon with condescension which was not without contempt.

The evening passed heavily. Mrs. Thornton wished to pet Jack, and was always irritating her husband, so that at last she got up with a sigh and went off to bed. Mr. Thornton himself crossed his legs, leaned his head back against the crimson satin chair and fell asleep; Jack laid down the *Times* which he had been studying deeply, and walked towards Oliver Trent.

‘As we have met here,’ he said, ‘will you give me five minutes’ conversation in the next room?’

‘Conversation? Oh, certainly.’

A heavy portière separated the rooms; that which they now entered, less gorgeous in itself, and less glaringly lit, was one in which Phillis often sat; her piano was in a corner, and a sudden remembrance struck Jack of the evening when she had been at the window, and had gone out to him at his request. A dark flush rose to his forehead

at the recollection; how changed were his thoughts of her since then, and yet by the strange irony of fate, or more truly by his own folly, then she was his, and now they were separated—for ever? Oliver Trent, watchful and composed, threw himself into a great chair; Ibbetson stood with his back to the fire. Moved by these thoughts, he was less at his ease than he had been throughout the evening, but it was he who had asked for the conversation, and he who had first to speak.

‘I saw young Masters last night,’ he began.

‘So I gathered. Did you find your interview worth the trouble it had cost you?’

‘You mean a journey from Rome? I think so.’

‘Indeed! Your mission then may be considered fortunate.’

Trent’s soft voice was touched with scorn,

perhaps a little more strongly than he would have permitted had it been under perfect control, but Jack took no notice. He repeated, 'I think so. I believe I shall now be able to remove some misunderstandings which have been causing his family considerable anxiety and pain. You will allow me to add that it strikes me as a pity that you ever suffered the misunderstandings to exist.'

'I certainly shall not allow you to add anything which implies that you have the right to interfere with what relates to the private concerns of my own family,' said Trent hotly.

'I am afraid the veto, if it rested in your hands, would be applied too late,' said Jack with a cool scorn which stung the older man. 'My advice has been already given.' And then he made a step forward on the rug, and a sudden fire flashed into his eyes which few persons had ever seen there. 'You are in

my uncle's house as his guest, and that, Mr. Trent, prevents me from speaking as plainly as I might otherwise do. But it does not hinder my thinking, and I leave you to imagine what is my opinion of a man who has suffered three helpless women, in a foreign land, to endure all the anguish of believing that their son and brother had sunk into a villain when a word from him would have lifted the load from their hearts. Suffered, did I say? Rather himself raised the suspicion in their hearts, and nursed it there.'

The contempt in the young man's tone was unmistakable. When Trent answered, it was as if he struggled to use the same weapons and could not bring them to bear.

' May I enquire from whom you have gathered these remarkable facts ? '

' From those who were interested,' replied Jack after a momentary pause. He did not

wish to bring in Bice's name, but Oliver understood whom he meant, and became almost livid. He started up.

' And it is you who venture to bring such scandalous accusations—you, whose conduct in Florence was so unworthy the name of gentleman that if Mr. Thornton, with his high and honourable character, was acquainted with it, he would not, I believe, tolerate you in his house! I repudiate your charge. It is false. If my cousins mistook my warnings, it is not my fault. The word you have used never passed my lips——'

Jack interrupted him.

' It could not. But you implied it.'

' Implied!'

' Yes. To women who were terrified at shadows—and no wonder. What did they know about possibilities or proofs?'

' Until you enlightened them,' said Oliver

with a sneer. 'Pray, Mr. Ibbetson, do you habitually indulge in romances of this description ? '

Jack treated this speech with lofty indifference.

' I have said my say, and there's an end of it I suppose,' he said, turning to the fire, and pushing a log with his foot. He went on speaking with his back turned to Trent. ' I intended to let you know my opinion, and have done so; as for the others who are mixed up in the matter, they can form their own as they please.'

' I have something of my own for you to listen to, though,' Trent answered, recovering his coolness. ' Your opinions are of too small importance for me to treat this impertinence as it perhaps deserves. Probably it arises from pique, and I may afford to pity it. But if we come to opinions I can give you my own hot and strong. I should

like to hear what any honourable man would say of a gentleman who, engaged to one lady, not only flung away her affections, but deliberately insulted her by trying to gain those of another who was already pledged. Eh, Mr. Ibbetson ? Is this cock-and-bull story your last hope ?'

There was enough truth in this speech for it to sting, and Jack felt an instinctive conviction that it was spoken for an auditor, and that if he looked round he should see Mr. Thornton standing in the doorway. There he actually was, and the anger and perplexity in his red face were so ludicrously strong, that Jack's anger was choked in an inclination to laugh.

' What is that you say, Trent ? Be good enough to repeat it,' he said, coming forward, and waving back the chair which Jack pushed forward.

' It is a private matter between your

nephew and myself,' said Trent, as if reluctantly.

'Private? Nonsense. You alluded to an affair in which I am as much interested as anyone. I knew there was something of which I had not been informed. Both of you were aware I was within hearing, so now I insist upon hearing properly. Well, sir?'

The last interrogation was addressed loudly to Jack, who was leaning against the chimney-piece in an easy attitude which seemed like a personal affront to his uncle. He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

'Mr. Trent was speaking, sir, not I.'

'Do you suppose I require to be told *that*? Mr. Trent was speaking, and he was saying things which you should be ashamed of anyone having the power of saying,' said Mr. Thornton, angrily.

'Excuse me. Not of any one. The

force of an accusation altogether depends upon who makes it,' said Jack, with a haughty look at the other.

'If you will allow me, Mr. Thornton,' said Trent rising, 'I will wish you good-night. Your nephew would naturally prefer to offer his explanations alone with you. I exceedingly regret my own rashness of speech.'

'Stop, sir!' said Mr. Thornton, bringing down his closed fist on his knees with a thump. 'I manage matters in my own house in my own way. Let me hear what you have to say, and let me hear what he has to say, and then I shall know something of where we all are.'

'You must make allowances for my feeling sore,' said Oliver, still apologetically, 'as the other lady to whom I alluded is my promised wife.'

'Now is that the truth or a lie?' reflected

Ibbetson. 'If it's the truth I had better have left the matter alone.'

'Do you mean that he tried to make her jilt you, while he himself jilted Phillis Grey?' demanded Mr. Thornton strongly. All Jack's indifference was shaken. He stepped forward, drawing himself up to his full height, and his face was resolute and stern.

'I see no use in dragging Miss Grey's name into this discussion,' he said, with a determination which impressed his uncle in spite of himself; 'but since you and Mr. Trent have done so, you will be good enough to understand that the facts have not been correctly represented. At the time of which he speaks, he was certainly not engaged to Miss Capponi, and as for my acting towards Miss Grey as you suppose, though I am perhaps a fool, I am not such an utter fool as that would prove me. That is sufficient for to-night, I think. Good-night, Uncle

Peter,' and he marched out of the room, with his head rather high, and without a glance at Oliver.

No one stopped him ; his uncle would have like to have done so, but was not sure that in his present mood he would have attended to his wishes. Mr. Thornton looked after the young fellow with an anger that was partly envy. Trent got up.

‘ I regret this very much,’ he said in his soft tone. ‘ He made an uncalled-for attack upon me, and I lost my temper and retaliated, without knowing that you were present.’

‘ Didn’t you see me ?’ said Mr. Thornton simply. ‘ Well, what you said explained a good deal. I never believed Phyllis would have set all my wishes aside.’ Then, as Trent remained silent, he went on—‘ However, they both of them know the alternative. When I have made up my mind I don’t change.’

‘No, you have an enviable force of determination. I believe it to be the secret of your success.’

‘No doubt, no doubt,’ said Mr. Thornton, rising also, and shaking himself as if he would have thus got rid of a lingering compunction. ‘I’m a plain man, and I keep to my word. None of your shilly-shallying for me, and that Master Jack will learn, in spite of his confounded airs. Good-night, Trent.’

CHAPTER III.

‘THE HAND OF DOUGLAS IS HIS OWN.’

JACK took care to come down late to breakfast the next morning, having no inclination to partake of it with Oliver Trent, and feeling sure that Trent would respect the punctuality which reigned at Hetherton. He had cold fare in consequence himself, though the old butler did what he could, and when it was finished, he received a message to the effect that Mr. Thornton was waiting for him in the small room where he sometimes transacted business. He was a little sorry to find Mrs. Thornton also there, for, although her aim was always to make peace, the result where her husband was concerned

was almost invariably of an opposite nature, all her married years having failed to teach her the management of his temper. She was fonder of Jack than of Phillis, and defended him wildly, in a manner which was most exasperating to an irritable man. Jack saw at a glance as he entered that some passage at arms had already taken place, for she was sitting upright, injured and tearful, while his uncle with a very red face poked the fire furiously.

'Very sorry to disturb you so early,' he said, brandishing the poker, and looking hard at a time-piece, 'we poor working men are obliged to descend to such insignificant details of life as punctuality. Of course with you it is different.'

'I don't know about that,' said Jack, good-humouredly, 'I'm afraid you're trying to chaff me. But you ought to allow I'm not often so late.'

‘That is what I told your uncle,’ broke in Mrs. Thornton with eagerness. ‘I am sure there are so many young men who come here who are so much worse——’

‘Much fiddlesticks!’ growled her husband. ‘What are those young idiots to me? However, you never can do anything that’s not perfect, so, of course I give in. I suppose I am to be told this morning that all this Italian business is just as it should be.’

‘We are both sorry that you should be disappointed,’ Jack said quietly, ‘but——’

‘Disappointed! The disappointment will be on your side you will find!’

‘Excuse me, I had not finished my sentence. I was going to say that grateful as I am for your kindness, this is a matter in which I could not allow anyone to dictate to me.’

‘Oh, very well, sir, very well. You must go your own way. I shall not attempt to interfere. Only you will quite understand

that neither you nor Phillis have anything more to look for from my hands.’

Mrs. Thornton broke in appealingly.
‘ My dear Peter ! Now do not be so hasty. You know how sorry you often are when it is too late.’

‘ Will you hold your tongue ?’ said her husband, glaring at her.

‘ You don’t really mean it,’ she went on disregarding, ‘ you know you don’t. Jack has been about the place ever since we came here twelve years ago, and he was a nice little boy in a short jacket——’

‘ *Will* you be quiet ?’

‘ No, I won’t. If nobody else is here to speak, I shall tell you what I think of it. There is nobody so near you as Jack. As to all this business, you know very well that it is no one’s fault but Phillis’s, she said so herself in her letters, and I do say it is a shame that the poor boy should suffer——’

Mr. Thornton was in a red heat of passion. Jack said abruptly,

‘No, that is not the case. Whatever blame there is—and I suppose there always is blame, first or last, in a broken engagement—rests entirely with me. It will be very unjust, Uncle Peter, if you visit my sins on poor Phillis. I tell you honestly that I liked the thought of Hetherton at first, I dare say I should like it still; but it was a mistake of yours, I think, though no doubt you meant it kindly, to mix up the two things together, and it makes it uncommonly hard upon one of the two, don’t you see? Set it right with Phillis, and I shall take my disinheriting without grumbling.’

Phillis was Mr. Thornton’s favourite as Jack was his wife’s, and this speech of Jack’s smoothed him down a little. But he shook his head obstinately.

‘Whatever I may be, I’m not a weather-

cock. I made up my mind deliberately, and I’m not going to change it for any boy or girl fancies. Marry Phillis, and you and she and your heirs after you shall have Hetherton, and plenty to keep it on. Don’t marry her, and I shall find another successor. That’s all. You can’t have it more plainly.’

‘Oh, it’s plain enough,’ said Jack with some bitterness, walking over to the window. What he thought was that it placed a wider gulf than ever between them. For he could not think that she cared about Hetherton, and he knew he did—to a certain degree ; and how could he come near her again with this condition hanging over them ? ‘Well,’ he said, turning back to the fire, ‘then there’s no more to be said, except that I still hope you will alter your determination. I wanted a word with you about young Masters.’

‘What of him ?’

‘Is he doing well ?’

‘Just the reverse. We should have sent him off by this time if it had not been for my very good friend Mr. Trent,’ said Mr. Thornton, pressing up his under lip and looking defiantly at his nephew.

‘What are his sins?’

‘Perhaps you don’t think so much of them in your set. We business men have an antiquated idea that it is dishonourable to give a promissory note when you have no means of meeting it when due.’

‘I am sure Jack would never be dishonourable,’ murmured Mrs. Thornton.

‘Ah—’ said Jack musingly. ‘Then the money was not forthcoming?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘And you heard of it?’

‘I was informed by Mr. Trent, who being interested in the young scamp——’

‘His cousin,’ put in Jack.

‘His cousin!’ Mr. Thornton looked

astonished for a moment. ‘Well, then, his cousin—very generously paid the money and got the note into his own hands. He acted throughout in the manner I should have expected from him, came to me at once, asked my advice, and begged me, if I felt it a possibility, to give the lad another chance. After consideration I consented. Pray have you anything to say against all this?’

‘Not to-day,’ Ibbetson answered quietly.

‘Not to-day!’ repeated his uncle. ‘Perhaps you intend setting yourself up as the young man’s champion against his best friend. And I tell you what, Jack. You seemed to me to be trying to pick a quarrel with Mr. Trent last night. Don’t let me see anything of the sort again. You will be good enough to behave to him as my friend.’

‘Not as mine, at all events,’ said Jack, smiling as he reflected that his uncle treated him with as much authority as if, instead of

disinheriting, he had just invested him with all his worldly goods.

‘And why not?’ demanded Mr. Thornton.

‘That I cannot explain at present. Never mind, Uncle Peter, we shan’t clash. I’m going up to town by the next train, and shall be out of the way.’

Mr. Thornton’s face fell. In spite of all that had passed, he was very much disappointed. He thought Jack, who seldom gave in to him and never lost his temper, and who was therefore a very pleasant companion, would have spent Christmas with them. Under present circumstances he could not condescend to ask him to stay, but he would have liked his wife to do so in private, instead of exclaiming,—

‘There, Peter, I told you so! Now you have driven him away. Your uncle didn’t mean it, my dear boy, though I don’t think you are right about that nice Mr. Trent.’

‘I haven’t said anything, have I?’

‘Well, I suppose it means something when you decline to meet him as a friend.’

“The hand of Douglas is his own,” quoted Jack. ‘I am very sorry, but I can’t do otherwise. And I must be off at once, if I am to catch the train.’

‘You can have the carriage,’ said Mr. Thornton gruffly.

‘No, thank you, the morning is so fine, I prefer to walk.’

‘Stop a moment. Then you are not going out again to Rome?’

‘Not unless I am obliged to do so. I shall spend Christmas with my father, and then come up for real hard work. Good-bye ; good-bye, Aunt Harriet.’

‘Hard work!’ repeated Mr. Thornton with scorn, as the door closed. And yet he was feeling a reluctant admiration for the straightforwardness with which the young

fellow had behaved. If he had been left alone he would probably have relented, but his wife, with the best intentions in the world, immediately rubbed him up the wrong way.

‘Of course you don’t mean it, Peter,’ she said anxiously.

Perhaps nothing irritates a man so much as being told that he does not mean what he has just proclaimed with some emphasis as his intention. He faced round,—

‘Don’t I? I mean every word of it. I gave them both fair notice.’

‘Then I do think it is a shame. And there will be nobody we care for to come after us. I don’t believe you will be able to think of anyone at all.’

Mr. Thornton was immediately possessed with a desire to prove his prescience.

‘Pooh!’ he said, ‘you don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m not by any means sure that it’s not a good thing for the pro-

perty that this has happened. Jack treats it all too lightly, as if money were got together in a week. I should prefer some one who would take my name, and go on carefully building up as I have done. Such a man as Trent, for instance. Highly principled, and thoroughly trustworthy, I don’t know such another. If it hadn’t been for him I should never have known the rights of this business.’

Mr. Thornton banged the door to emphasise his last sentence, and then frowned, hearing Jack whistling as he ran down the steps. With the frown on his face he went in pursuit of Mr. Trent.

‘Look here, Trent,’ he began, ‘that young clerk’s business was plain enough, I suppose?’

‘Quite so,’ said Trent steadily. ‘Your nephew has been talking of him? He seems to have taken an unaccountable prejudice against me, but I am sure I wish his efforts could prove the poor boy blameless. I have

done my best in that direction, and failed. From his being a connection of my own, and from an especial cause of interest, I am peculiarly desirous for it. Nothing else could have led me to appeal to your kindness as I have done, and I assure you I cannot be sufficiently grateful.'

'Never mind that,' said Mr. Thornton with a wave of the hand.

'Excuse me, it is impossible to forget it. I can take credit for nothing but entire frankness in the matter. Dismissal would have been ruin, and with most men dismissal must have resulted; but I could not have allowed you to remain in the dark, and your kindness in the matter may be the saving of the unhappy boy.'

'What can Jack know about him?' asked Mr. Thornton.

'Probably some distorted account of the matter has reached him,' Trent replied calmly.

'Unfortunately, as I said, your nephew is prejudiced against me. Does his opinion affect you? Because, if so, you must allow me to insist upon Masters's dismissal.'

'Affect me? Certainly not,' said Mr. Thornton, swelling. 'I am not likely to be influenced in my opinions by Master Jack. Besides, he seemed to take his part.'

'You may be sure that I am keeping an eye upon him,' said Trent, not noticing these words. 'If I see anything at all unsatisfactory, your interests will at all times be paramount to every other consideration. Have you seen the paper? I was wishing particularly to hear your opinion on last night's news.'

CHAPTER IV.

PURSUIT.

JACK had an hour in which to think over his plan of operations as he went flying up to London in the express. The day was bright and frosty, the sky lightly flecked with clouds, the trees beautiful with the lights on their trunks, with the delicate web-work of their branches clear against the blue, with ivy hanging here and there brave and green. Every little pool of water showed a deep steely blue. Red berries brightened the hedges, and at the stations there were bundles of glossy holly and mistletoe, tied up for the London markets, hampers thrust into the train, a general air of approaching good

cheer. It was next to impossible not to feel some exhilaration, actual or reflected.

And yet his own position was not very enviable just now. He had lost Phillis, he had lost Hetherton, and he had an awkward affair on his hands for which, except in the moments when his easy-going nature was roused to an active dislike of Trent—and these moments quickly exhausted themselves—he felt a strong distaste. He meant to carry it through, because Phillis had set her heart upon it, but he had nothing of the detective in him, and at no time found any satisfaction in proving a fellow-creature a sinner. So that, although the remembrance of Bice's wistful eyes stirred him, and he was aware that it would be cowardly to leave friendless Clive under the shadow which had been thrown over him, he yet would have been glad to have kept Oliver Trent's share in the matter in the background. It was

partly laziness, partly a general good-will. As he was swept along by the train, past field and copse, and commons, he tried to think of some possible means by which justice and mercy might both be satisfied, but, as is generally the case, found it hard to keep the balance true. Perhaps he would not have minded so greatly if he had not found Trent domiciled at Hetherston. He knew nothing, it is true, of that last idea of Mr. Thornton's, but he saw that he was on a very friendly footing there, and hated the notion of being the one to push him out. The consequence of all these misgivings was that when he reached Waterloo Station he had not made up his mind as to any more definite course of action than that he would go out to Kensington again in the evening, and get Clive to speak more freely.

When he found himself there, after some hours of work in his chambers, he was told

that Mr. Masters had not come in. He went for a stretch along Kensington High Street as far as Holland House, where the trees stood up dark against the grey dusk, and then came back to receive the same answer. The girl, with a dirty apron thrown over her arm, was too much taken up with staring at the visitor, to be communicative.

‘Can you tell me at all whether Mr. Masters is likely to be in soon?’ asked Ibbetson.

‘No, sir, I couldn’t.’

‘Is he generally back by this time?’

‘Sometimes he is, and sometimes he isn’t. Mostly he is,’ she added with the jerk of an after-thought.

‘I’ll go in and wait, I think. No, I won’t,’ he said finally, feeling a strong dislike to anything which looked like invading Clive’s secrets, whatever they might be.

After a little deliberation he left his card with a few pencilled words on it to say that he would call at the city office next day, in order to appoint a meeting, and went back to his lodgings.

He found himself thinking a good deal that night of Hetherton and Oliver Trent. His presence there was unlikely to bode any good to Jack's interests, and yet that very conviction made him dislike to be the one to expose him, if exposure should be needed. But calmer reflection made him believe this to be impossible. There might be some error, or possibly an exaggerated putting forward of his own services, such as should impress Bice, but of anything worse, Jack in the kindness of his heart, which always reasserted itself, after he had been stirred to anger, was disposed to acquit him. Yet it was difficult to reconcile the small bits of information which as yet were all he had

succeeded in picking up with each other, and he fell asleep with the determination to induce Clive to speak more clearly, now that chance had disclosed to him this business of the promissory note.

The following morning he was at the office in good time. Of course he was well-known there, and there had been days when Mr. Thornton dreamed of his taking to this city life—a dream which never got any nearer to its fulfilment, but which always could be remembered as a grievance. Old Davis, the senior clerk, was fetched in a moment. Ibbetson was beginning to explain his errand, when Davis interrupted him.

‘Walk this way, if you please, sir,’ he said, ‘and we shall have the place to ourselves.’

‘What a den it is, to be sure !’ said Jack, looking round the dreary little room, with its drearier fittings. ‘Davis, do you mean to

tell me you don't sometimes feel disposed to hang yourself ?'

' Bless my soul, sir, why ?'

' Why, for want of anything more lively to do. And this is what that unfortunate Masters has to grind at ! ' continued Jack in an audible soliloquy.

Davis caught at the name.

' The fact is, Mr. Ibbetson, ' he said, looking grave, ' we're in great perplexity about Mr. Masters.'

' What's happened ?'

' He hasn't turned up to-day at all.'

' Ill, I suppose,' said Jack.

' Well, sir, not at his lodgings. I sent a boy off and I find he has not been there since leaving this at the usual hour yesterday. Then he was in good health, to all appearance. I can't help fearing there's something wrong.'

' Good Heavens, Davis, what can be wrong ? ' said Ibbetson hastily.

‘The young man has not been himself for some time, and perhaps that makes me nervous,’ said the old man with a deliberation which tried his companion’s patience. ‘Besides, if you know him, Mr. John, you are aware that there has been an unpleasantness about a money matter. It always is love in money with those young fellows. He got into debt, borrowed from one of those really money-lenders, giving him a promissory note, and when the time came had nothing to meet it. I believe it was a small sum, and it’s not such an uncommon story, but a bad one to get to the ears of the principals, and somehow or other, I’m sure I don’t know how, that is what happened here.’

‘Ah, I see,’ said Ibbetson.

‘The consequence is that they have looked coldly on him ever since, and you’ll understand, Mr. John, that others who would not be shocked on their own account will



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‘The consequence is that they have looked coldly on him ever since, and you’ll understand, Mr. John, that others who would not be shocked on their own account will

follow the heads, if only to curry favour. I've been quite surprised, I declare, to see how many know it. And I can't help feeling sorry for the poor lad, wrong as he has been, for he seems to take it to heart terribly.'

'Does he say anything for himself ?'

'Well, he has a cock-and-a-bull sort of story,' said old Davis, putting his head on one side. 'He was sent down to Birmingham on business the week the note became due, and he says he gave the money to a man he trusted to pay it up for him, and that the man has made off or something, for he can find no trace of him. Very unlikely, I am afraid. Mr. Trent did all he could in the matter, paid the money, and made it a personal favour to Mr. Thornton to keep Mr. Masters on, but I feared how it would be when I saw how much had leaked out. I'm sorry, too, for I liked him.'

Jack walked to the dingy window and looked out.

‘Have you no sort of idea where he has gone, if he has gone, as I see you believe?’

‘Yes,’ said the clerk confidently. ‘I think he has gone to Liverpool.’

‘Why?’

‘They all go there, that’s one reason. And then I know he has been asking questions in and out about Liverpool of one of the others. I feel pretty sure he has America in his head.’

‘Now, Davis, you can do me a favour,’ said Jack, coming back suddenly. ‘We’re close on Christmas. Make some excuse about his absence to-day—put it on me if you like—and, give me a chance of getting hold of him. I shall go down to Liverpool at once. And, mind you, it’s my opinion he will turn out not to blame in that money business.’

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‘But, Mr. John, how can I——!’

‘Nonsense, man, you haven’t been here five-and-twenty years for nothing. I’ll telegraph back, and be responsible to my uncle,’ added Jack with a half laugh. ‘Hey, boy, call a cab.’

He left Davis standing bewildered, drove to his lodgings, crammed what he wanted into a portmanteau, and dashed off to the station, luckily catching a fast train. On his way he had plenty of time for reflection on the increasing oddity of his position. There seemed so little to connect him with Clive, that it was absolutely comical to realise that Clive had brought him to England, excited him to various warlike passages entirely opposed to his usual temperament, and was now drawing him off on what was likely to prove a fool’s errand. ‘I hope Phillis at least will appreciate my efforts,’ thought Jack, with a laugh. It was she, not Bice, who

presented herself to his mind as the motive power for his present energy, her influence always keeping its full strength when they were apart, while Bice's faded, seeming to depend upon presence, and probably the fascination of her beauty. And yet Jack's kind heart was enlisted by this time on behalf of the young fellow, who, he could not but believe, was in some strange way a victim.

While he was in London, there had seemed a chance of finding Clive at Liverpool, but when in the darkness and bitter cold of a December evening he stood on the Liverpool platform, the chance seemed to run down at once until it looked like an impossibility. The police were his only hope, and he drove at once to a police station in order to put them on the track, experiencing the usual relief in finding how ordinary—however doubtful—a matter he seemed to be engaged upon. A superintendent put a few questions,

gave a few instructions, and then delivered his opinion. Always supposing that the young man had come there at all—in which case America was tolerably certain to be his aim—it was of course quite possible that he had got off that day, but not likely. In the first place he was a stranger and would not know how to set to work, and would be shy of asking advice—a good thing, too, put in the superintendent. It would be necessary for him to dispose of, or change his clothes, as money for others would probably be wanting. Also he would have to ship himself. At some seasons this might be a difficulty: but Christmas was not a bad time for him to have chosen, as men did not like sailing just then, and therefore hands were scarce. There was a chance, and not a slight one, that he might go on board that very night, and if he meant to hide, there might be difficulties in getting him away. That the

superintendent could not pronounce upon. But his own opinion inclined to the more hopeful view that he would not sail till the next day. Ibbetson was not sorry to be advised to leave the inquiries absolutely in their hands for that evening, only promising to be ready at an early hour the next morning in case he was called upon to accompany them.

The call came when he was sound asleep, and a message was joined to it to the effect that he was begged to lose no time. Accordingly he was quickly downstairs, and found a policeman waiting at the door of the hotel.

In the damp chill of the early morning—very damp and very chill it was—it was almost a matter of course that things should look yet more hopeless than they had looked the night before. Night appeals to the imagination and works her wonders easily,

while morning is coldly prosaic and depressing. A little rain had fallen, lights were still flashing about, shining on wet stones, on which bales and barrels lay heaped ; and of the great forest of masts in the river, only those near at hand were beginning to loom out of the mist. Jack's conductor walking briskly along, and quite unaffected by atmospheric influences, told him that they had found that one vessel was to sail that day, and that the gentleman was not on board.

‘ And that’s all ? ’ said Jack, disappointed.

‘ That’s all, sir, at present. She has been closely watched, and if he joins her it will be soon, and you can’t miss him.’

‘ Keep out of sight,’ said Ibbetson, ‘ and if he does turn up, settle with the captain and come to the hotel.’

They had reached the wharf where the vessel lay, and Ibbetson sat down on a barrel. His watch did not last long. A young

light figure came running, carrying a bundle, and leaping over a coil of rope which lay in the way, and Jack, more from precaution than any actual conviction that this was Clive, stopped him. It was the young fellow's start which first assured him, but recognition did not at once dawn in Clive's eyes. When it did, he turned pale.

‘You here!’ he stammered.

‘And just in time,’ was Jack's cheerful answer. ‘I never did anything half so neatly in my life before. My dear fellow, don't be looking round to see how you can give me the slip. The most inveterate of bores never stuck to you as closely as I shall stick.’

‘Mr. Ibbetson,’ said Clive imploringly, ‘let me go. It's my best chance, it is indeed —don't be so hard on me as to take it away. Somehow or other everything has got into a mess here, and over there,’ and as he spoke he pointed towards that shadowy world out

of which the masts were beginning to stretch themselves, 'I may do better.'

'You will do better here,' said Jack.

'No, you don't know.'

'Yes. I do know—quite enough. Come along,' he added, drawing him away, and anxious that the policeman should not become visible. 'If there is a mess, the more reason you should be here to set things right;' and seeing Clive was still reluctant, he added more gravely, 'Look here, Masters. If, when we've gone into the matter and tried to put it straight, it seems as if America would be your best chance after all, I give you my word I'll help you to go there in a straightforward fashion, better than this. Now we'll get back your clothes. Are they sold?'

'Most of them.'

'Let's hunt them up again, then. You lead on, for I know nothing of the place.'

‘But how on earth did you come here?’ asked Clive, beginning to find time for astonishment.

‘Well, I heard from old Davis—I must telegraph to him, by the bye—and came down last night, made a few inquiries, and hearing the Queen of the Ocean was to sail, kept an eye upon her.’

It sounded so simple in Jack’s cheery voice, that Clive, who had fancied he had arranged so as to baffle all pursuit, listened with a blank conviction of powerlessness.

‘My coming away didn’t matter much,’ he muttered.

‘Except to yourself,’ said Ibbetson quietly. ‘Hallo, is this the street?’

Clive was silent through all the transactions which followed, but when, restored to his own garments, he and Ibbetson had nearly reached the hotel, he said suddenly,

‘I don’t know how much or how little

you know, but you may as well hear the right facts.'

'Not till we've breakfasted,' said Jack with decision. 'This early rising has a wonderful effect upon the appetite. Breakfast first, afterwards your story if you like, and then we'll go up by the 11.30 train.'

CHAPTER V.

CLIVE.

CLIVE's shyness and depression made it no easy matter to get at the facts, even when he had begun to tell them. He was cast down by this failure of what he had set his heart upon, slow to believe that he was trusted, and on his side suspicious of the other man's intentions, until Jack grew angry. It is difficult for those who all their life long have been accustomed to have unhesitating credit given to their word, to understand the doubts, the fears of those less fortunate in trust, though perhaps not less deserving of it. And yet as Clive sat in the coffee room, with his elbows on the table, his misery was so apparent

that Jack resolved to do his best to pull him through. He worked his questions patiently backwards and forwards.

‘All that’s clear enough,’ he said, leaning back and clasping his hands round his knee. ‘You owed a little money, and that means of escape—though destruction would be the better word—always *is* placed conveniently near at hand. Don’t tell me any more about that part of the business. The other half is the most important. You had scraped together the money, principal and interest?’

‘Every penny,’ said Clive looking up quickly.

‘How could you manage that?’

‘I’m sure I hardly know,’ he said with a half laugh. Then he added, with more confidence than he had yet shown—‘You wouldn’t understand my shifts. I sold some things, and the rest I got out of myself

somehow. I wonder now I didn't break down.'

'I expect you did,' muttered Ibbetson, glancing at the hollow cheeks, and reflecting that this foolish attempt at escape was probably the outcome of broken-down nerves resulting from a life of semi-starvation. And Trent had looked on pitilessly! Clive went on with his story in a dull voice, making no attempt to appeal to his hearer's sympathies :

'I was sent down to Birmingham a day or two before it became due, and I left the money with a man I knew—Smith. I didn't hear anything, but I never doubted its being all right till I got back and found that he had bolted and that the money had never been paid. From that day to this I haven't heard a word of him. I dare say you don't believe me.'

'But I do,' said Ibbetson impatiently.

‘ My dear fellow, for pity’s sake, pluck up a little spirit! Why shouldn’t I believe you ? ’

‘ Nobody does, that’s all.’

‘ Well, we’ll make them. Now, why don’t you trace this man ? ’

‘ I can’t.’

‘ How have you tried ? ’

‘ I went to his lodgings of course, and made no end of a row. There they said that he went out one day—the day after I left, it must have been—with a bag, and has never come back. I’ve been there again and again and never got anything new. Then, you see, I can’t afford detectives and all that sort of thing——’

‘ They’ll soon get hold of him,’ said Ibbetson, looking at his watch.

‘ No, they won’t, for Oliver Trent was awfully good, and undertook to set them to work.’

‘ And paid the money for you besides ? ’

‘The fifty pounds? Yes. I owe it to him, and if you’d let me go, I’d have paid it back one of these days.’

‘Then I can’t see why you shouldn’t have stopped on and worked steadily. I don’t suppose he’d have pressed you.’

‘I would, if I’d only thought he believed me. But he didn’t, not a bit more than the rest of them. It takes all the spirit out of a fellow. And now, they’ll taunt me about this—I tell you, Mr. Ibbetson, it’s no use. I can’t face it all again.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Jack sharply. ‘Don’t let your troubles drive you into being a coward. It seems to me, though I don’t pretend to preach, that there are one or two things you might have remembered, Masters, which would have tided you over. Not face it? Face it, and clear it up.’

‘That’s very fine to say,’ groaned Clive.

‘Well, we’ll see. It’s time now to be off.

what was it to him? Were they not separated? Did he even love her? He was not sure. He only hated Mr. Penington, and indulged in some expression of his feelings.

Altogether it was an odd sort of Christmas Day which followed. He had a strange unreasonable impression as if he were shut out of the homes which were his by right; thoroughly unreasonable when it came to be sifted, since it was very certain that there was not one at which he would not have been welcome. Perhaps he nursed this notion, to account for the cloud which seemed to have grown up since he read his Roman letter with all Miss Cartwright's kind messages, but the impression of banishment and disgrace ever after haunted his remembrance of the day.

In the afternoon he took Clive to the lodgings of the man who had absconded,

asking some questions by the way ; the lad seldom opening his heart sufficiently to speak without being questioned. Yet every now and then Jack caught a glimpse which showed him he was not ungrateful.

‘Was Smith a steady fellow ?’ he asked.
‘Did he seem in want of money ?’

‘Oh, he wanted money, of course. Most of my friends do,’ said Clive with a laugh. ‘But he was steady enough. The last man in the world I should have expected to serve me so. This is the street.’

‘Well, keep well out of sight,’ directed Jack. ‘We’ll see if I can’t make an impression on the landlady.’

He found her voluble over her wrongs—
‘To have gone off quite unexpected without by your leave or with your leave, and not a word of notice, nor to have heard nothing from that day to this, and the rent owing, and—’

dog roses clamber over the hedges, it is a pleasant pastoral country along which you may wander for hours, and strike upon picturesque old windmills, and quaint little village churches nestling under the downs—but in grey winter, not much charm is left. Ibbetson went doggedly along, neither looking left or right. He began to think of Rome, which, indeed, was never far from his thoughts. Absence from Phillis had shown him more and more how much nearer she had been to him always than he had fancied, but surely a hundred times more now that she was lost. His own folly seemed absolutely inexplicable. As a gloom began to creep over the distance, he pictured her perhaps standing on the Pincio watching the wonders of the sunset, the golden glow, the grave and glorious purple of the domes, lying softly rounded against the sky; the pale stretch of distance which, sweeping onward

‘That’s exactly what I should have thought, only I couldn’t make it out; for I am sure when I go away for a day or two I always tell my landlady, and Mr. Smith would probably have valued you sufficiently to do the same, so that I should have expected him to say something.’

‘Well, sir, he *did* mention a name.’

‘I was certain he would. But I dare say you naturally thought, when he didn’t make his appearance the next day or afterwards, that it was only intended to put you on a wrong scent?’

‘Well, I don’t deny it. And you see, sir, they came bothering me so with questions, one young gentleman in particular, I’m sure fit to tear the place down; and there’s so many unpleasant things as happens on the papers, and my sister Mrs. Walker, says she, “Mary Jane, don’t you go mixing yourself up with you don’t know what,” and another

enough. Nothing kept him from it except that new energy which seemed to impel him towards work. He was not really ambitious. What had stirred him was a strong feeling that his idle life was unworthy of himself and her—nay, perhaps more of himself than of her. For when a man who believes that he is a responsible being is once roused to face his idleness, it is apt to become a nightmare under which he can no longer remain quiet. Ibbetson longed to go, but he knew very well that he must stay.

There is a pretty village green at Broadwater, and old trees cluster round the church. Coming out of the churchyard was the sexton, and to him Jack addressed the question which he had learned to vary, although only for his own satisfaction. The old man looked at him doubtfully.

‘There’s a many Smiths about,’ he said, striking at once on the waiter’s truism. ‘I’m

a Smith myself. Might it be something to his advantage, or the other way, that was a bringing you ?'

'For his advantage, I hope,' Ibbetson said smiling. 'But you are not the man. George Smith, about five-and-twenty, sallow, with black hair.'

'Ah ! Comes from London ?'

Jack looked at him eagerly. 'Is he here after all ?' he said quickly. 'Come, that's good news at last.'

'What makes you so keen about it ?' asked the old man curiously. 'Well, it don't matter to me. Them that he's with won't be very ready for you to see him or to thank me for telling you where to find him, but Elias Brooks shouldn't have tried to make mischief between me and the vicar, this very day, too. I said I'd be even with him, and I will. There, sir, that's the cottage, hard by. George Smith is lodging there, has been

there for weeks, ill, and if they tell you to the contrary, you needn't believe them. I said I'd be even with him. Thank you, sir. Don't you listen to nothing they tell you.'

Jack walked through a little garden to Elias Brooks' door, and knocked twice. He could see the old sexton hobbling away, unwilling perhaps to be pointed out as guide, but still furtively watching. At the second knock the door was partially opened, and a stout bullet-headed man appeared.

'I wish to speak to Mr. George Smith,' said Ibbetson, placing himself so near the door that it could not be closed.

'No one of that name here,' said the man in a surly tone.

'Yes, he is here,' Jack said quietly.
'Perhaps he is called by another name, but Mr. Trent has seen him.'

'Are you come from him?'

‘No. But I know that Mr. Smith is in your house, and I mean to see him. I suppose you would prefer my doing it quietly to calling in the police?’

Nothing could have been more cool or determined than his manner, and Elias was evidently uncomfortable.

‘I don’t know who your Mr. Trent may be,’ he growled, ‘nor Smith neither. There’s an invalid gentleman here by the name of James, and he don’t want no visitors.’

‘Which is it to be? Will you admit me, or shall I send for the police?’ asked Jack, unheeding.

‘I tell you he’s ill.’

‘Well, choose for yourself.’

With an oath the man flung open the door and called to his wife—

‘Here’s a gentleman forcing his way in to see Mr. James. Take him up, take him up. I ain’t a going to have a row here to please

the doctor, nor nobody. I dare say it'll kill him, but that ain't my affair.'

Jack, glancing at the pale cowed woman, did not put the question he intended, as he followed her up the stairs. At the top she struck a light. 'The poor gentleman has been sadly ill,' she said tremulously.

'And is still in bed?'

'Oh yes, sir.'

She went to the side of the bed as she spoke, and pulled back a curtain. Ibbetson almost started at the gaunt, death-stricken face which met his view. He said quietly: 'I must apologise for disturbing you, Mr. Smith, and I am very sorry to see you so ill.'

'Better now, thank you.'

'I have come from London on purpose to ask you a question, and have had no end of difficulty in finding you out. I come from Clive Masters.'

'Poor old Clive! He didn't think when

we parted it would be so long before I saw him again. 'I just came down to these lodgings to get a breath of fresh air from Saturday to Monday, and here I've been ever since. I did rather wonder that Clive had never sent or written.'

'He did not know where you were.'

Smith shook his head feebly.

'Oh yes, he knew. I had one visitor from him, his cousin, Mr. Trent. He came after the fifty pounds which had been left in my hands. You see, for a long time I was quite unconscious, so of course it gave Masters a good deal of anxiety. But it was no fault of mine.'

He stopped, gasping for breath.

'Did Mr. Trent get the fifty pounds?' asked Jack.

'Of course. Didn't Masters tell you?' Smith said in some surprise. The woman had crept downstairs again, they could hear

her husband's grumbling tones and her faint replies. Jack stood looking with some perplexity at the wasted frame, wondering how much he ought to tell. He decided to tell him all.

‘He did not so much as know it himself’ he said quietly. ‘From some motive or other, Mr. Trent has advanced him the money but has never told him that it was his own and received from you.’

Smith stared at him. He passed his thin hand across his forehead, lifting the lank hair. ‘I don’t understand,’ he said. Jack left his words to reach his comprehension without repeating them. ‘That can’t be so,’ Smith said presently, ‘because Clive knew he had only to apply to me.’

‘He had no address.’

‘He could get it.’

‘No. That is just what he could not do. Mr. Smith,’ said Jack abruptly, ‘from all

can hear there has been no fault whatever on your side, and you could have done nothing. Mr. Trent has chosen to keep your whereabouts concealed, and to get things into his own hands. But the upshot is that Clive has been miserable, has tried to make a bolt for America, and that I came down here to-day on the strength of a clue which we drew out of your London landlady yesterday.'

'But the money is gone!' said Smith in a hoarse voice. 'He must have done it only to give Clive a lesson—don't you think so?'

'Perhaps,' Ibbetson said laconically.

'And he won't deny that I gave it?'

'I think not. At any rate I shall know, and so will Clive, and—no, I don't think he will deny.'

Smith sank back with a sigh of relief. Jack was standing gazing thoughtfully into the dark corners of the room, lit only by a

single candle. 'Do they look after you well, here?' he asked.

'Yes, fairly enough. I've nothing to complain of. Though I've thought it odd that no one should come to see me.'

'Perhaps Clive will get a day soon. And you might change to a pleasanter situation. I shall say good-bye now, and I shall take good news to Clive.'

'Did he suppose I'd gone off?' Smith asked with a touch of amusement, as the other shook hands. Downstairs the man took no notice as Ibbetson passed through the little passage, but as the wife opened the door Jack said with emphasis,

'Let your husband understand that other friends of Mr. Smith will be here to see him very shortly. And remember that if he is well looked after, you will not be the worse for it. All will depend upon that point.'

It was dark and very cold when he got

outside, and he went swinging along to the station at a great pace. On his way up in the train he wrote three notes which he posted as soon as he reached London. One was to Davis :—

'Set Mr. Masters right at the office with anyone whom it concerns. It is a fact that he gave the money to another man to pay in, and this other was seized with illness. I have seen him to-day. See that Mr. Masters is thoroughly cleared.'

He hesitated longer over his second note. Finally he wrote :—

'My dear Uncle,—Until I see you, I must ask you to take for granted the fact that young Masters has not been guilty of the conduct attributed to him. I have taken the trouble to go thoroughly into the matter, and can prove it beyond a doubt. I am writing by this post to Mr. Trent. If he should have left Hether-ton, will you kindly forward the letter?'

Over his third he did not hesitate at all :—

‘Mr. Ibbetson presents his compliments to Mr. Trent, and having this day had an interview with Mr. George Smith and learnt from him that the fifty pounds entrusted to his care by Mr. Masters was paid by him to Mr. Trent as Mr. Masters’s representative, Mr. Ibbetson requests an explanation of this fact as well as of certain statements which have been circulated by Mr. Trent to Mr. Masters’s prejudice.’

He wrote this rapidly, but he looked at it with dissatisfaction, reflecting that it was almost impossible to give vent to your indignation in the third person. And then he began to think of Mr. Penington.



CHAPTER VII.

WHO WILL LIVE AT THE VICARAGE?

PERHAPS few evil-doers are marked down as such with so little personal eagerness and satisfaction as was Oliver Trent by Jack or Clive, who, indeed, necessarily took only a passive part. There was nothing in Jack's nature congenial to the task, and his only wish being to set Clive on his legs again, as soon as there was a good prospect of this labour being accomplished, he cared nothing at all for bringing down punishment on Trent.

Clive's own feeling, when he heard the news, was rather shocked and bewildered than in any way revengeful. His cousin hav-

ing been a sort of good genius in his eyes, the one successful man of the family, the friend who had placed him where he was, and to whom he believed himself indebted for all that had been done either to shield him or to push him on, the revelation which Ibbetson brought was beyond his comprehension. All the new hopes which had been excited in his mind really turned round a central desire that Trent should recognise that he had spoken the truth and not disgraced his family. And now that Trent himself should be the one on whom disgrace and shame should fall! It was more than his mind could grasp.

Neither, think as he would, was he helped by seeing any imaginable motive for his conduct. If he could have found it he might possibly have acquiesced in what had happened, as something for which Trent—the adviser—had reasons, and believed that he

would also soon have had reasons for clearing it up. Clive's faith was shaken, but it was not yet absolutely gone, from the very difficulties of understanding why on earth Trent should have acted as he had apparently acted. Jack had muttered something about having him in his power, but that seemed ludicrous while Clive could trace no advantages to result. Jack himself, indeed, was not half so clear about it as Phillis, whose womanly intuition had leapt to a conclusion not far from the truth; and when he found out something of the young fellow's perplexities as to his cousin, he respected the feeling and abstained from much comment. He supposed that it would be necessary to see Trent, perhaps in Clive's presence, and that then certain home truths would require expression, but for so long as they could be postponed, he was not at all unwilling to postpone them. Meanwhile there was a real satisfaction in seeing

how Clive brightened under this lifting off of his troubles. He held himself straighter, and altogether had a more open and hopeful appearance. Ibbetson felt no anxiety in leaving him, and went down to his father's for a few days. There a letter followed him from Mr. Thornton, very concise and formal, taking no notice of his remarks about Clive, but alluding to his own regret at losing his good friend Mr. Trent, who, he grieved to say, had received letters the morning before which induced him at once to start for Rome.

Jack crumpled the letter in his hand and shoved it into his pocket.

‘Bad news?’ asked his father. ‘Here’s bad news for me at any rate. What do you think, Arabella? Carter finds that horse he wrote about as likely to suit me to a T, has just been picked up. It’s uncommonly annoying. Do you think your uncle has anything that would do for me, Jack?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Jack, ‘I haven’t seen his stables lately.’

‘You seem to me making a mull of matters with your uncle,’ said his father, pouring out his coffee from a peculiar machine of his own. ‘I have never interfered, for I think his manners are insufferable, but if you don’t object to them you might have done better, I should say.’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Jack brightly. ‘I dare say I should think so if I were you ; but being myself, I don’t exactly see what I could have done.’

‘Couldn’t you marry that girl ?’

Jack flushed.

‘She didn’t care to marry me,’ he said stiffly.

‘Whew !’ said his father, lifting his eyebrows. ‘Not enough money, I suppose ?’

‘I doubt that influencing her,’ said Jack, in the same tone.

‘Well, you’d better look out, for I hear there’s a man of the name of Trent a good deal at Hetherton, and your uncle swears by him. It’s quite certain we never get any luck in our family.’

This was a statement which, with Lady Ibbetson sitting by, who might have been supposed by outsiders to have brought her husband a good deal of the sort of luck to which he alluded, could only be received in silence. Jack finished his breakfast and took himself off to the smoking-room. Trent seemed to haunt him, and he had an uneasy feeling of not knowing how much or how little to say. Then he remembered Bice, and began to wonder whether this sudden departure of Trent’s was an energetic effort on his part to forestall disclosures, or at any rate to soften their force. If what he had said was true, and the two were engaged, he might be able to enlist her feelings in his

favour. Jack had desired Clive to write, but was not very sure that he had yet done so. Now he promptly made up his mind to write himself to Phillis.

The letter was not easy to him. When he had written before, they were engaged to be man and wife, and he remembered, with a pang, the feeling of dissatisfaction with which he had laid down her little missive from Bologna. It had seemed to him as if nothing in it went below the surface, unconscious as he chose to be that it was he who had kept her there, he who had chilled and disappointed her. Well, he was punished now, he thought gloomily, and the shy brown eyes seemed to be looking at him with sympathy. He had lost Phillis, and he had lost Hetherton. He knew his uncle, with all his foibles, was a just man, and fond of Phillis, so that he had little doubt that after his solemn assurance that he alone was to blame,

he would provide liberally for Phillis, though not to the extent of making her his heiress. The estate might perhaps be reserved for Oliver Trent, if Jack kept silence. Jack was not sufficiently superior to mortal weaknesses to find that reflection pleasant. But it would have been easier to endure, or, at any rate, so he thought at this moment, if he could have shifted the cause of its doing on any shoulders but his own. He made a wry face as he acknowledged his own absolute folly. He would thankfully now have thrown away his old prospects of Hetherton for the hope of winning Phillis, but it was far from soothing to remember that he had flung both to the winds. First he had listened too easily, then repented too hastily, then had found out too late what he might have known from the very first. It seemed to him as if he could never reproach another man with folly. And he had a distracting consciousness as he wrote—

stopping every now and then, jumping up to poke the fire or do something which might by some good chance assist his expressions—that although it was Phillis, and nobody but Phillis, who had sent him on his errand, she would believe nothing but that Bice's deliverance had been the actual spur. It made it, as has been said, difficult for him to write. He did not like to paint Trent's conduct in too black colours, lest it might seem it was his object to effect a break between him and Bice. Yet it was quite clear to him that the break ought to be effected, if only it could be done by other hands than his, and he grew vexed that he had not assured himself that Clive would speak out and to the purpose. His sentences read coldly, because he wished to treat all that part, which was his only excuse for writing, in a business-like manner. Phillis, thinking to shield him, and feeling sure it would be broken, had not told him of

the actual tie existing between Bice and Oliver Trent, and he guarded his words about them both with an evident restraint. It was a great relief to him when at last his letter was finished and placed in the letter-bag, and then he half smiled to find that his thoughts had wandered to a calculation of the number of days that must pass before he would receive an answer.

His stepmother met him in the hall. She had an uneasy manner which Jack hated and called mincing, but a good heart underneath, to which he persistently blinded himself. When a kindly-natured person does get hold of a prejudice, you may be sure he will take a firmer grasp than one less amiable. Perhaps there is a secret satisfaction in finding himself able to dislike someone heartily, or perhaps it is so unlike himself that he is instinctively convinced that excellent reasons must exist to justify him.

Jack had never been able to forgive Lady Ibbetson for marrying his father, although he knew quite well that she made his home as happy as he would allow her to make it, which was a reservation not likely to be removed. And this sense of his own injustice did not render him more friendly towards her. With the best intentions in the world, all she did seemed to rub him the wrong way. Naturally, she had changed the old furniture at Elmsleigh, but unfortunately the change was not justified by the results; for taste, being an artistic feeling, is as subject to failure as other points in which our ideal is beyond our powers of execution, and is by no means that simple intuition which people like to imagine it. Conservative Jack had been much disgusted by the shifting and embellishment of chairs and tables he found on his arrival had taken place, and which she, poor misguided woman, had pointed out

to him with pleasure as improvements. He had the grace to keep his opinions to himself, but for almost the first time in his life it seemed as if his father's spirit of opposition had been roused in him, and Lady Ibbetson sighed, after one wistful glance in his face. She was almost timidly desirous to please him, and never showed at her best in his presence, finding a not unnatural difficulty in understanding him. Now she spoke with evident effort :

‘Your father tells me you are going back to town to-morrow. Is that really a necessity? It is so long since you have been here, and this has been such a very short visit. I had hoped you would have stayed over Tuesday, and that we might have had some people to meet you on that day.’

‘Thank you,’ said Jack shortly, ‘I can’t afford any longer time.’ Mentally he was

thinking, 'Where on earth does the woman get her gowns?'

'You are working very hard, then?' she ventured to say.

'Well, it's necessary.'

She hesitated, looked round, and said in a low voice—

'I hope you will not think what I am saying interfering,—perhaps I might not have spoken, but that your father alluded to—to it at breakfast. It is your engagement I mean.'

Jack drew himself up, and she went on hurriedly—

'Pray do not think I am asking questions from curiosity. But sometimes pecuniary difficulties cause a great deal of unhappiness and—and I thought I would venture to say that if this were the case—'

'It is not, indeed.'

'Ah!' She looked at him with wistful

disappointment. ‘Then I must not say any more. It has always seemed to me a most grievous thing, that money should unnecessarily play such an important part in these matters, and I should have been very sorry if it had been allowed to do so with you.’

Jack was touched—it was impossible not to feel that she was speaking from her heart—though he was no less stiffly determined to accept nothing at her hands. Nevertheless, she brightened at his tone, for he spoke warmly :

‘I am exceedingly obliged to you. Money has not made any difficulty here. And as to my working harder than I have done, it is more from shame for past idleness than from ambition for the future, I am afraid.’

‘Jack,’ said his father, coming in at the door with a little girl clinging to each hand,

‘will you ride over to Whitcote this morning?’

‘Whitcote? Yes,’ said Jack, wondering; for Sir John seldom made these early expeditions.

‘Hastings wants me to look at the schools. There’s a new Vicar coming in, and things have to be put straight. Time, too.’

‘Jack,’ said little May, possessing herself of his hand, ‘tell us about Cartouche. Does he *always* jump out of the window when you go back?’

‘And does he beg? Carlo begs,’ this from Effie.

‘Poor Cartouche!’ said Jack, ‘I’m afraid he is wanting in all accomplishments.’

‘Accomplishments means music and drawing,’ said May, with a stare. ‘Dogs don’t do their scales.’

‘Don’t tease, children,’ said Lady Ibbetson. It was one of the things in which she

and her step-son were at cross-purposes, for he was fond of children, and she always nervously afraid that they annoyed him. She carried them away now unwillingly, looking back and calling to Jack that he had promised to come into the school-room.

It was not until they were close on Whitcote that he asked his father who the new Vicar was.

‘He’s called Penington, I hear,’ said Sir John, pulling up his cob to look at a field of springing wheat. ‘Don’t know the name, but Hastings speaks uncommonly well of him.’

‘I met a man of that name in Rome. He had a sister with him.’

‘That’s he. Hastings said he had gone abroad for two or three months’ rest before beginning work again. And I dare say he would have a sister. I hear he’s a likely man to marry. There’s the Vicarage: you

can see the chimneys ; it's been uncommonly improved and made into really a nice place. Hallo, here comes Miss Ward. You recollect the Miss Wards, cousins of Mrs. Hastings, and living in that little cottage half a mile on ?'

A kindly, intelligent faced woman greeted them.

'Sir John, you are the very person I wished to see. *Do* you know of a horse ?'

'Another horse, Miss Ward ?'

'Another ! I should think so. That last great thing wouldn't go at all. How d'ye do, Mr. Ibbetson ? I didn't see it was you. But really, Sir John, we are in a pretty condition : reduced to the butcher's mare to take us to the station, and when we want to cut a dash among our neighbours, to the most extraordinary affair from Hedsworth. Do be neighbourly and look in at our stables. You'll find three waiting to be looked at, and

they've all something against them. One has curby hocks, I know—whatever that may mean.'

'It means a strong objection.'

'Well, the other alternatives are age and nobility of appearance, and youth and snobishness. I am inclined to youth; the habit of requiring to be shot is very serious.'

'I'll give my opinion at any rate,' said Sir John laughing, 'and so shall Jack. By the way, he has just come from Rome, and seems to have met your Mr. Penington there.'

'Has he, really? Mr. Penington is our other subject just now; he and the horses form a sort of conversational see-saw. Very charming, is he not, Mr. Ibbetson? But you need not tell me if he is not, for we all agree in placing him on a pinnacle of merit, in order that we may have the excitement of gradually deposing him. Otherwise, I might whisper to you that we are already—just a little—hurt.'

‘Why?’

‘Well, we considered—and justly, I think—that coming here unmarried, we had a right to the excitement of choosing him a wife. But in a letter from his sister to Mrs. Hastings, who is, you know, her old friend, she seems to hint that he is taking it on his own shoulders.’

‘Oh, ho! Any names mentioned? Perhaps Jack may know her, too.’

‘No, no, not so bad as that. Still it is bad, I own. You’ll look at those horses then, won’t you?’

‘To be sure. How was it you weren’t at the Grange on Friday?’

‘I was making up my accounts. I always think that is only a decent tribute to the departing year. Remember me to Lady Ibbetson, and do try to consider that horse a treasure.’

Sir John, who liked the Wards, went on

talking of the way women were taken in about horses, Jack meanwhile riding along without hearing many of his father's words. So it had come to this, for he could not doubt that Phillis was the one to whom Miss Penington alluded. There was the pretty Vicarage to his left, standing picturesquely among trees, a pleasant home-like place, such as he could well imagine she would love. He thought of her, brought there by that man, going in and out of the gate on her kindly errands, waiting, perhaps, in the porch to welcome him——

Well, what could he say? He had had his chance and had thrown it away. Since he had loved her, he had understood very clearly what she had found wanting in his love before. Now it seemed to him as if it had been an insult. He felt no hope. He had had his chance and had thrown it away.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETURN.

JACK kept his intention, and went up to London the next day. He had made up his mind absolutely that he would not go back to Rome, having a new sort of feeling born within him, that after all that had happened he had no right to haunt Phillis with the persistency he had shown of late. It no longer seemed to him fair. He thought that the most manly course would be to leave her alone at any rate until this winter were past. Then, if she were still unwon, he might be able to speak to her of a love which she might at last recognise as steadfast. How could she be expected as yet to trust him? But he

got into a habit about this time of brooding on the picture he had seen as he rode through Whitcote with his father—the pretty homely Vicarage, the creepers growing up to the chimneys, the green turf, the rooks' nests in the old trees. And always—that was the worst—there stood a woman's figure at the door, a woman whose eyes were fastened on the gate, as if she were waiting happily for some one.

Still, a good deal of credit was due to him for the way in which he fought against these not very cheerful thoughts, so as to escape from the morbid dejection which might have made his life, and that of others, miserable. Work is an excellent refuge, as everybody says : probably because it is an axiom which is seldom taken on trust, and therefore comes freshly to each person in the form of an individual discovery. Jack worked hard, and liked it. Clive was another refuge ; he

needed a great deal of cheering and keeping up, his own struggle not having had the effect of putting life into him. He was shy and sensitive, and many people would have thought uninteresting, but Ibbetson wanted a personal interest about him just at this time, and had a feeling as if here were a slender link with Phillis. He sometimes laughed at his own efforts to prop up Clive, and yet he did it vigorously. The props were of many kinds—getting him to take school work in an East-end district on Sundays, he began to think would turn out one of the most effectual.

A disappointment which Jack felt very keenly at this time, was the receiving no answer to his letter to Phillis. He had made sure she would write, and, though he even told himself that he was prepared for what she might tell him, there was a horrible blank in the silence, which seemed almost worse.

He invented reasons for her silence with really remarkable ingenuity, but the one which seemed most probable was, that she did not wish to enter on the subject of her own prospects with him. When Clive came to see him or he went to see Clive, the conversation revolved curiously round one or two centres.

‘Well, how are you getting on?’ Jack would ask with great cheerfulness.

‘Oh, I don’t know.’ This with much depression.

‘Nonsense. What are you out of heart about? Davis sticks by you, I’m sure.’

‘Yes, he’s a very good old chap. But what’s a fellow to do when the heads are against him?’

‘Why do you think they are?’

‘Well, Thornton was up yesterday, and I could see by the way he looked at me.’

‘What rubbish, Clive! You go steadily on, and never mind looks.’

‘Don’t you think it matters?’ more hopefully.

‘Not a brass farthing. Have you heard from your people at Rome?’

‘Yes, I got a letter from Kitty last night.’

‘Well?’

‘Oh, nothing particular. Oliver’s there. I say, there *must* be something he could explain if one saw him. He couldn’t have the brass!’

‘Does Miss Masters mention anyone else?’

‘No, I don’t think she does.’

‘Not—the Leytons?’

‘Didn’t notice it. Are you going down to Worthing again?’

‘Yes, I am. To-morrow perhaps,’ said with gloom on Ibbetson’s part.

The visit to Worthing, when it did take

place, had one or two results. For Jack found Smith so unmistakably worse that he went to the point of getting him to sign a declaration in the presence of one or two witnesses, as to that matter of the fifty pounds. And this being done, he had a conversation with the man Elias Brooks, also in the presence of a witness, so that he felt himself in a better position to meet Oliver Trent should it ever be necessary. But as yet he had made no sign.

One day Ibbetson had another visitor in his chambers, Mrs. Thornton. How she had got there was the first wonder in his mind ; for she was a very helpless person, seldom going to the point of originating even an idea.

‘ My dear, and your chimney been smok-ing ! How can you live here ! ’ was her greeting.

‘ It’s not a bad chimney when the wind

isn't from the north,' said Jack, wheeling forward a chair, and flinging the end of his cigar into the fire. 'But you ought to have told me you were coming. It's very good of you, Aunt Harriet.'

'I told no one,' said Mrs. Thornton, with a placid air of triumph at her own achievements, 'not even your uncle Peter. But, my dear Jack, I am quite miserable about you.'

'How can I help it?' Jack replied gravely. He knew what she meant, and would not pretend not to understand her.

'Oh, I do so wish you would go straight out and marry Phillis, before this dreadful man gets hold of her! Really, it is too provoking.'

There was a pause.

'What have you heard? Has Phillis written?' asked Jack in his quietest tone.

'Not Phillis. And that is vexing your

uncle, too. He says everything is concealed from him. Mr. Trent wrote and told him.'

Jack muttered something not complimentary to Mr. Trent. Then he said aloud :

'You need not believe everything *he* says. However, I can't say, I know nothing. Phillis will not conceal anything from you, you may be sure.'

'But why don't you do something quickly? I really can't tell you all my fears. Your uncle seems so put out and so dissatisfied, I really doubt whether it would not be too late if you two were to marry even now. He doesn't seem to know his own mind. Perhaps he might come round if you went and did it,' she added, as if it were a matter to be settled easily by some such proceeding as walking across the street.

'You forget—there's the other man,' said Jack, finding it impossible not to smile. 'Listen, Aunt Harriet, if it's any consolation

to you, I'm quite aware I've been a fool. But I give you my word that Hetherton is a very secondary consideration.'

'Well, I shall tell your uncle,' she said, looking doubtfully at him.

'That I have been a fool? But then you must go on about Hetherton.'

'Oh, I couldn't.'

'Then leave it alone; it's the safest way, take my word for it. I know it's all your kindness for me, but there are so many old proverbs haunting me about making one's bed, and sowing and reaping, that I feel sure they amount to a general verdict that I must be left to my fate. Thank you all the same for trying to ward it off.'

Each of these rumours which reached Jack—although he sometimes told himself that they were too indefinite to be heeded—did actually give him a sharp pang, and seemed to leave his heart heavier than before.

He refused invitations, and did his best to absorb himself in his profession, setting to work with a dogged determination to push on, rather than any exhilaration of hope. Still there was a certain satisfaction in his labour, and at least a more manly purpose in his life. And so January dragged its short days out of the darkness, sometimes barely succeeding in the effort, and February followed, and to Ibbetson every day was long in its monotony, and yet, looking back, they might all have passed like lightning.

At least that was what it seemed to him one gloomy afternoon when he stood with a telegram in his hand which had just been given to him, and which he had opened carelessly, without any foreboding of the thrill of pain in store. It was from Rome. Miss Cartwright was very ill—would he come at once. The words startled him the more that he felt with keen self-reproach how other

interests had pushed her out of his thoughts. There are tender and strong affections so close and so unfailing that they are like the air we breathe, and become almost as much a matter of course. And now Jack remembered with a pang that of late he had written but briefly to his aunt, and that except from a general longing to hear news from Rome he had not noticed that her own letters had become few and short. He pulled out her last from his pocket ; the feeble writing smote him to the heart, and he impatiently gave his orders, sent off a hurried note to Clive, and found himself at the station at least twenty minutes before the time for starting.

He travelled as fast as he could, and happily there were no unusual or vexatious delays. But at its best the journey is one which, when a pressing anxiety goads on the traveller, seems as if it would never end. It

face, though he had a little difficulty in recalling that it belonged to young Giovanni Moroni. He would not linger to speak to him, though he had always liked the young fellow, for the nearer he drew to the end of his journey the more acute became his anxieties, and the more annoying every small delay. He rattled quickly down the hill by the Costanzi, and along the streets which lead to the Spanish Place, and then into his own particular street. Nothing was to be gained by looking at the outside of the house, and some hidden fear kept him from questioning the old porter, who lived in a little glass room and mended shoes. Miss Cartwright's rooms were high ; a dark dirty staircase went up, up. He lingered for a moment at the window half way, which looked upon picturesque and irregular backs of houses ; women were peeping out, creepers hanging, there were the usual con-

verging lines of a network of wires, up and down which swing the brass pitchers, that fill themselves where the fresh water pours out from the lion's head below ; at one small square window a little owl was sitting, blinking solemnly at the world. It all seemed just as he had left it, and gave him a momentary unreasonable relief. But at the top of the stairs stood some one watching and waiting. It was Phillis, and she put out her hands with a cry of thankfulness.

‘ You are come ! ’ she said. ‘ We heard wheels, but scarcely thought it possible you could be here so soon.’

‘ How is she ? Not worse ? ’

‘ She is very ill—very. I am afraid it would be false comfort if I told you there was any improvement, but the pain has gone off, and her one wish was to see you again. This waiting has been terrible. It was

pleurisy. We wrote to tell you, but she grew suddenly worse.'

'And you have been with her?'

'How could I leave her?'

Her lips quivered. She was shaken and upset with the nursing, perhaps, too, with the feeling that he was coming, and with other things which had risen up. They stood face to face with each other, these two, for a minute, utterly silent, before Phillis said hurriedly—

'I must tell her that you are here. Will you come into the little anteroom and wait until she is ready?'

In the anteroom were two or three doors ; one led into the salon, another into Miss Cartwright's bedroom. At this second a black object was crouched, which at sound of Jack's voice reared itself up, and came eagerly towards him.

'Yes,' said Phillis, answering the young

man's look with a sad little smile, 'Cartouche is the most faithful of watchers, poor fellow! At first he lay under her bed, but that worried her, and she asked that he might be sent out. And since then, strange as it seems, he has never attempted to go into the room, but has taken up his position here.'

She signed to Jack to stay where he was, and passed through the curtained door. He stood with his eyes fixed upon it, feeling that pause of solemn expectation with which we wait when we know that we are to enter on an awful Presence, awful both for its strangeness and its nearness. All sounds intensify themselves in such a waiting: it seemed to him that a hundred things were going on; he heard the distant cry of the water-sellers, the roll of wheels, the laughter of the crowd, a fly buzzing at the window. Cartouche gave a low whine, and went back to his station, sitting against the door with bent

attentive head. No one came. At last a woman bustled into the room, and lit a small brass lamp with four wicks branching out on different sides and slender chains hanging. Then she, too, paused and listened.

‘The poor Signora!’ she said to Jack, clasping her hands. ‘It is near the end. And we all loved her. Eh, and look at the dog! It is strange.’

Just at that moment Phillis opened the door and signed to Jack.

‘Her weakness is so great,’ she said in a whisper, ‘that the very joy of your coming is almost more than she can bear. But she will not wait.’

No. He understood why she would put nothing off when he saw the white changed face, lit up as it was with happiness as he knelt down and kissed her. ‘My boy!’ was all she said at first, but lay holding his hand and smiling now and then. Miss Preston,

who had been standing at the window, went softly out, crying. Phillis only paused to tell Jack that one of them would be in the ante-room, before she followed her. Those two were left behind—two, and the shadowy Presence.

‘You’re not in pain, Aunt Mary?’ said Jack brokenly.

‘Not now. It has quite gone now. God has been so good all through, and He has brought you back.’

‘I came at once, but I wish I could have heard before.’

‘Yes, my dear, I know, I know. I hope it was not selfish to want you, but you always were my boy. And, Jack——’

‘Yes, Aunt Mary?’

Speech was very difficult, but she struggled with it, and he put his ear down near her face—

‘—you have never known her—Phillis.

And I was foolish and urged it. Now I see that I was wrong—we can't tell what is best, can we?—only I think—I pray you two may have whatever is best for you both. I think you will. God knows—and I have prayed—'

The words died away, but she made a sign to him not to call anyone, and lay in peaceful waiting, every now and then touching his face or hair with a feeble yet caressing hand. In that waiting the room darkened, the little lamp glimmered in the shadows, a strange hush seemed to have fallen. Presently Winter came in, looked at her, went out and brought the others. She smiled at them, and whispered something which they made out with difficulty. It was 'Cartouche.'

Phillis brought him, a little anxious lest he might show any wild demonstrations of delight. She need not have feared. He

came eagerly in, put his paws upon the bed, and licked his mistress's hand. Then he dropped down, looked wistfully at the faces round, as if he wanted reassurance from them, and finding none, he turned quickly, ran to the door, pushed it open, and settled himself in his old position of intent watchfulness.

Afterwards they none of them knew how these long hours had passed, but at the time there was the usual mixture of the awful and the commonplace. Our thoughts cannot remain long on heights ; they wander down, concerning themselves with the oddest things, and causing us sharp pangs of self-reproach, for what, after all, is no more than a law of our being. Once there came a ring of the bell, and Winter went out and brought in a little note for Phillis. When she had read it, standing at the table by the lamp, she laid it down and came back to the bedside. Jack

had to go to the table presently to get something that was wanted, and his eye was caught by the clear bold signature—‘Arthur Penington.’ He hated himself for having seen it, but there it was.

The doctor came and went, Cartouche walking growling behind him to the top of the stairs. The streets grew more silent; the occasional cry of the masquers, the carnival laughter, died away; and still they all watched, and still the feeble breathing was audible in the quiet of the room, with now and then a word. It was not until a pale gleam of light had grown into the sky above the hills of Tivoli, touching the broad flank of Soracte, and showing Michael the Archangel guarding the great city from his castle, that the last word faltered on her lips, and the hand which had moved feebly towards Jack lay still and cold in his warm clasp.

CHAPTER IX.

ONCE MORE, NO.

TIRED as he was with his quick journey and with the hurrying emotions of the past night, Jack was too restless to stay in the house. He called Cartouche, and the dog, after a little hesitation, went with him, though without any of his usual excitement. He kept close at Ibbetson's heels, from which nothing drew him, and walked along with his tail depressed, and his whole appearance spiritless. Jack's own heart was very heavy. The kind, gentle woman had been like a mother to him, and a hundred remembrances of her unselfishness came thronging. He was vexed with himself for having left her, for having ne-

glected to write as often as she liked—for many things of which he knew very well she had kept no record, nor so much as blamed him in her heart. Those tender cancellings are the sharpest reproaches of all, when Death has laid his finger on the page.

Then, as he walked on, his mind wandered off to the speculations from which who can be free, when one who has been near to them passes away from their reach? Could she still see him? What was the actual separation between them? What infinite mysteries had already been made known to her? Jack had no fixed aim, but he thought he would go on to the English cemetery and choose the place where she was so soon to lie. He did not know the exact way, and found himself by San Gregorio: the bell was tolling, and he went up the broad steps. There is a little chapel connected with it, one of a group of three, in which he remembered having

long ago seen a quire of angels painted by Guido, which had haunted him. He found the sacristan, and went with him across a little untidy picturesque garden, sweet with violets, and gay with great irises, purple and white. The chapel is very bare and like a barn, but at one end is the beautiful fresco ; the white wings seem to clash, the blissful faces glow down upon you—over what might be the battlements of heaven—with a purity and grace which are rare in Guido. Jack paid the sacristan to let him stay there by himself for a little while ; he was glad he had come, thankful to have had this quiet and peaceful hour with the praising angels above and the sweet scent of spring violets stealing through the door. Then, as he came out and stood on the steps of San Gregorio, the full glory of the sun was shining on that stately and beautiful view which stretches before the church. Feathery clouds dappled the blue of

talking of the way women were taken in about horses, Jack meanwhile riding along without hearing many of his father's words. So it had come to this, for he could not doubt that Phillis was the one to whom Miss Penington alluded. There was the pretty Vicarage to his left, standing picturesquely among trees, a pleasant home-like place, such as he could well imagine she would love. He thought of her, brought there by that man, going in and out of the gate on her kindly errands, waiting, perhaps, in the porch to welcome him—

Well, what could he say? He had had his chance and had thrown it away. Since he had loved her, he had understood very clearly what she had found wanting in his love before. Now it seemed to him as if it had been an insult. He felt no hope. He had had his chance and had thrown it away.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETURN.

JACK kept his intention, and went up to London the next day. He had made up his mind absolutely that he would not go back to Rome, having a new sort of feeling born within him, that after all that had happened he had no right to haunt Phillis with the persistency he had shown of late. It no longer seemed to him fair. He thought that the most manly course would be to leave her alone at any rate until this winter were past. Then, if she were still unwon, he might be able to speak to her of a love which she might at last recognise as steadfast. How could she be expected as yet to trust him? But he

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When he reached the Via della Croce he found, as he might have expected without allowing it to cause him a sharp disappointment, that Phyllis had left it, and had gone back to the hotel. It was not possible for him to follow her until quite late in the day. Miss Preston, who, it might have been imagined, would have liked to have kept matters in her own hands, was so subdued and full of grief, as to be quite helpless and unable even to offer a suggestion. She had been rather disposed to blame Miss Cartwright for not throwing off her invalid habits when first she came to Rome, and now reproached herself bitterly. Indeed it seemed

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the sky, tender and yet deep : golden and ruddy lights fell on the convent which crowns the ridge of the Palatine, the convent whose nuns pray patiently on the spot where emperors held their revels ; up against the buildings two palms stood proudly ; the great arches of Nero and Severus were black with shadows ; here and there an almond blossomed, rosy red, and all the light cloud of trees below was touched with the mysterious and indescribable promise of the spring.

Jack walked slowly back, and Cartouche followed sadly behind him. There was something in the dog's mute sympathy very grateful to the man, piteous though it was to see the wistful questioning of his eyes. They went home through little back streets, to avoid the crowded thoroughfares where all Rome was making her carnival holiday. It does not penetrate much into those crooked and picturesque byeways, and, indeed the day was

needed a great deal of cheering and keeping up, his own struggle not having had the effect of putting life into him. He was shy and sensitive, and many people would have thought uninteresting, but Ibbetson wanted a personal interest about him just at this time, and had a feeling as if here were a slender link with Phillis. He sometimes laughed at his own efforts to prop up Clive, and yet he did it vigorously. The props were of many kinds—getting him to take school work in an East-end district on Sundays, he began to think would turn out one of the most effectual.

A disappointment which Jack felt very keenly at this time, was the receiving no answer to his letter to Phillis. He had made sure she would write, and, though he even told himself that he was prepared for what she might tell him, there was a horrible blank in the silence, which seemed almost worse.

He invented reasons for her silence with really remarkable ingenuity, but the one which seemed most probable was, that she did not wish to enter on the subject of her own prospects with him. When Clive came to see him or he went to see Clive, the conversation revolved curiously round one or two centres.

‘Well, how are you getting on?’ Jack would ask with great cheerfulness.

‘Oh, I don’t know.’ This with much depression.

‘Nonsense. What are you out of heart about? Davis sticks by you, I’m sure.’

‘Yes, he’s a very good old chap. But what’s a fellow to do when the heads are against him?’

‘Why do you think they are?’

‘Well, Thornton was up yesterday, and I could see by the way he looked at

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isn't from the north,' said Jack, wheeling forward a chair, and flinging the end of his cigar into the fire. 'But you ought to have told me you were coming. It's very good of you, Aunt Harriet.'

'I told no one,' said Mrs. Thornton, with a placid air of triumph at her own achievements, 'not even your uncle Peter. But, my dear Jack, I am quite miserable about you.'

'How can I help it?' Jack replied gravely. He knew what she meant, and would not pretend not to understand her.

'Oh, I do so wish you would go straight out and marry Phillis, before this dreadful man gets hold of her! Really, it is too provoking.'

There was a pause.

'What have you heard? Has Phillis written?' asked Jack in his quietest tone.

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as if the sweetness of that death had touched and softened all; Winter went quietly about on tip-toe, with oddly gentle movements. As for Cartouche, who could tell what was passing in his mind? How much did he know? This much they all noticed, that having watched patiently for so many hours in the anteroom, he would not now go near it. He buried himself in a corner of the kitchen, and only came out or took food when Jack went there and coaxed him.

Necessarily, every arrangement fell on Ibbetson, and it was necessary they should be made with a promptitude which at such a time seems almost inhuman. They occupied him all the day, so that, as has been said, it was quite late before he was able to follow Phillis to the hotel.

She was alone when he was shown up, sitting, in the dusk, near the wood fire. He had longed all day for this moment, and came

in quickly, with a sudden delight at finding her there by herself. Something in her manner checked him instantly. It was nothing upon which he could seize, and it was perfectly gentle, but he felt that, in some way or other, it recalled to him the change in their position, which in his eagerness he had seemed to forget. And it vexed him the more because the night before certain vague thoughts had almost taken the form of hope. She was sitting with her back to the fading light ; he could not see the expression of her eyes, nor much more than a pale face, the outline of a slender figure, the hands clasped on her lap. Every now and then as she gave him the details of his aunt's illness, or repeated some tender message, her voice faltered, but she carefully avoided the least allusion to her own feelings, and he was certain that she intended him to feel that the barrier between them remained unmoved. A chill restraint

crept over them both. Once, when his words took a somewhat warmer and more personal form as he thanked her for all she had done, she interrupted him, although still quite gently :

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘that I have been very glad to have had this talk with you without the others being here? There are many things one can’t talk of before friends, however kind they are. But they may come back at any moment now, and I have a great many things to say. So don’t let us waste our time.’

Jack muttered something about the others. She did not seem to hear him, but went on hurriedly :

‘You ought to know how things are going on with the Masters. I’m afraid it is not very satisfactory. Has anyone told you that Mr. Trent is still here?’

‘Still? Well, certainly I did think that

circumstances would have ousted him by this time.'

She gave him a quick, inquiring glance.

'I thought your letter would have been strong enough to do it. But—please excuse me—did you speak plainly enough? I couldn't help having a feeling that you were making the best of his conduct, and—and it almost seems a pity,' said Phillis, provoked at her own lame ending. She had thought she knew exactly what to say.

'Didn't I speak out?'

'Well, it is certain that man can twist everything to suit his purpose, even his own misdeeds.'

'Yes,' assented Jack quietly. 'He has a wonderful strength of plausibility.'

'And he has managed to persuade Bice—I don't know what he hasn't persuaded them all—that it was a mistake about the fifty pounds, and that though now he no

longer doubts that Clive paid it, the man never repaid it to him. Somehow or other he has made her believe that he has acted straightforwardly, and has suffered for it. And, myself, I can't help fearing that there are some other complications, and that he has that foolish Mrs. Masters in his power. But now that you are here, things will be put straight, I hope.'

'Yes. I suppose there will have to be a blow up,' said Jack, not very cheerfully.

There was a curious thrill—was it pity or reluctance?—in her voice when she went on rapidly:

'I blame myself for something. I ought to have told you before you went away that Bice was engaged to Mr. Trent. I believe I thought something would be sure to happen to put an end to it.'

'I heard it from Trent himself. And it still goes on?'

‘Yes. The marriage is to be at Easter—or was.’

If there had been a clearer light in the room, Jack might have read something in Phillis’s face, some hidden pain, some struggle with herself which might have disarmed him. As it was, he was hurt by her persistent belief in his caring for Bice. He said in a hard and strained voice, which she interpreted as pain from her own point of view—

‘Here is a budget of news, indeed ! It seems one should be a villain if one desires to succeed successfully.’

Phillis only thought of the pain in his voice. She leant forward and said with eagerness—

‘But of course you will not allow her to be sacrificed ?’

‘I ? Why not ? I suppose she knows what she is about—most women do,’ he said

with gloom. But the next moment he turned towards her. 'Really, I can't tell what she wishes, but I'll tell you what I'll do. She shall hear the precise facts as fairly as I can put them, without exaggeration. After that she must judge for herself. A woman ought to have some sort of notion what the man is like whom she intends to marry, unless, indeed, she cares for him so much that she is content to be blind. In that case——'

He stopped. Phillis repeated quickly:

'In that case——'

'Hadn't she better remain undeceived?'

She sighed. It seemed to her that he made her task very difficult.

'Well, at any rate, let her judge fairly,' she said.

'Yes, that's due to her.' He leant his arms on the table, and began pulling some cyclamen out of a great bunch. '*Viole pazze*,' he went on; 'Rome seems to have as many

flowers as Florence. By the way, do you remember hearing me speak of a young Moroni who used to be a good deal at the villa? He came in my train yesterday from Florence.'

'Did he?' said Phillis absently. The constraint between them seemed to increase; they might have been strangers. Her effort had been greater than she knew, and she felt more sad and weary than before Jack came in, while something told her that the hardest part was to come. Jack himself went on playing with the poor cyclamen, no less uncomfortable than she. He wanted to say something about Hetherton, and did not know how to begin. Phillis relieved him of the difficulty. 'Tell me something about Aunt Harriet, please,' she said. 'It is an age since she wrote. Of course you saw her while you were in England?'

'Yes. I went to Hetherton at once, and

to my amazement found that fellow Trent spending his Christmas there. Did you know he was so thick with them ?'

' I ? No. They hardly write to me,' said she, with a forlorn sense of loneliness. ' But they were well, weren't they ? '

' My uncle was horribly cut up by—by your determination, Phillis.'

' I was afraid he might be sorry.'

She knew that what she dreaded was coming, and her heart beat wildly ; but she said the words quite calmly, and as if they related to someone else. Jack crushed a flower in his hand, and leant forward.

' *She* was sorry, too,' he said in a low voice. ' Can't you think differently ? I know I was the one to blame, but can't you let me——'

She interrupted him with a hasty gesture.

' That subject is at an end between us ; pray do not return to it.'

But that it was so unlike her, he could have sworn he detected a slight accent of scorn in her voice.

'Well, Phillis,' he said, getting up, 'I daren't do it, if you forbid me. I don't suppose I've gone the way to work to make you believe what I want to say. Perhaps I'd better have held my tongue, as I intended. It was the seeing you with her, I suppose, and thinking that perhaps—however, if it is as you say, and the subject must be at an end, will you give me a kiss, Phillis, before we part?'

She covered her face with her hands, and drew back quickly and without a word to soften the gesture.

'Not?' said Jack, in the same slow tone. 'Well, don't fear. Whatever I am, I won't be a bore. I understand fully all that you mean—all. It was you, remember, who promised we should always be friends—

There, don't be afraid, I am going. Good-bye. God bless you, Phillis.'

But long after he had gone she kept her face covered—perhaps because she was trying to shut out even the remembrance of what had past, perhaps because she feared her own impulses. For as the door shut, she had felt as if her very senses went out in a wild cry to him to come back. *Not?* If he had but known how hard that moment was, how it was against herself that she shrank with the movement which had wounded him, how she had fought with the longing that his request called up! If she had kissed him she could have fought no longer, she must have flung down her arms. Why not? Why not? For the first time this persistent question seemed to have gained strength, and she set herself to answer it reasonably. Why not?

She went back to the early days of their

engagement. Its romance had come to her very quietly, and untroubled by fears or doubts. Jack had always been her hero from the time when he had embodied one by one all that her storybooks offered in that line. She used to listen triumphantly to the school exploits which he poured into her fascinated ears. She could have no greater delight than to go with him to feed the rabbits, or the wild-fowl on the lake. He filled a far more important part in her life than she did in his, and so, though the gladness was great, she felt neither surprise nor misgivings when he asked her to marry him. Her inexperience was even greater than her youthfulness; she loved him, and it was both natural and sweet that he should love her.

But when, little by little, she understood that his feeling was of a very different nature from hers, an uneasy shame that she should

have been so lightly won added a sting to her sorrow.

Jack had not been mistaken in fancying that there was a touch of scorn in her voice when he made that last appeal. The scorn, however, was directed rather against herself than him. She knew so well why he had made it. She had been expecting it all the time. She had always had a presentiment that Miss Cartwright, who loved her very dearly, would say something to her nephew which would bear this sort of fruit, and his speaking only assured her that her dread was well founded. If Jack had but known it, he had chosen the worst possible moment for his appeal. Did he think that she was going to make another mistake? And Mr. Thornton too—as he had almost admitted—had probably spoken very strongly, and had no doubt weighted his words with threats about the future of Hetherton. Phillis started up

and walked to the window, locking her hands together as she walked, but there was not the slightest hesitation hidden behind the movement. Though she loved Jack so well that she thought it would almost break her heart to see him shut out from Hetherton, she would never suffer herself to become its price.

For Jack did not love her, of that she felt sure. He pitied her, perhaps; liked her, possibly; reproached himself, she did not doubt; but these were only shadows with which she would never again content herself.

Somebody else loved her, or so she had begun to fear, and it was curious that her clear judgment failed as she thought of Mr. Penington. For she was wondering whether she should ever marry him. He was very good, and kind, and clever, and—

‘In the dark, my poor Phillis?’ said a cheerful voice. ‘And all alone? I am

afraid it was very inhuman of us to leave you. Come, confess, haven't you been thinking so? At any rate, somebody else was almost rude to me about it. I felt quite horrid.'

'I've not been alone,' said Phillis, thinking as she spoke that her own voice sounded curiously odd and unsteady. 'Mr. Ibbetson only went away a few minutes ago. I almost wonder you did not meet him.'

'I thought I caught sight of a coat like his. I will say for him that his coats are well cut. However, his companionship can hardly have been cheerful.'

'We had a good deal to talk about,' said Phillis gravely.

'Of course, my poor dear. But I think it is very hard so much has fallen on you. And do tell me, for I am dying to know——'

'What?'

'Did he ask a great many questions about

the Masters? Has he seen any of them yet?’

‘No.’

‘No? Are you sure? Well, I suppose he could hardly hurry there at once, but I’m much mistaken if he waits long, and then what will be the next act in the play? Will poor Mr. Trent receive his dismissal? Now, Phillis, it’s too dark to see you, but I know exactly how you’re looking. I can’t help it; I shall always say that Mr. Ibbetson has behaved abominably. There was no one to call him out, for Harry could never have been brought to comprehend that was part of his duty. But I must speak.’

‘Don’t blame him to-day, at any rate,’ said Phillis in a low voice that was full of pain.

‘Is he so much cut up? Well, poor fellow, I really am sorry for him, though I pity Cartouche more... And you, too, my

dear. You have had a terrible time of it while we have all been going on in a most shamefully selfish way. Not Mr. Penington. I must do him the justice to say that I don't think you've been out of his thoughts for a minute. And how nice he is! Oh, dear, there's the *table-d'hôte* bell! You'll not go down, of course? No, I told Giuseppe so as I passed. But you won't mind Mr. Penington coming up afterwards? He wanted to so very much that I hadn't the heart to refuse him. Besides, he is very understanding and won't tease you; you needn't even try to talk, for he has a whole heap of Etruscan tomby things from Corneto, and wants Harry to take us all there. I shan't go. I know exactly what it's like, one of those horrid dirty little places where one can only eat the middles of things.'

She lit the candles and went away, leaving Phyllis just where she had found her, so

that the girl's thoughts, which this conversation had hardly broken in upon, rapidly shaped themselves again in the same form. She would have told herself that Miss Cartwright made the centre, and perhaps she did, but round that centre, with its tender and gentle recollections, how many other fancies grouped themselves.

And somehow or other that evening the question, which she had not yet answered to her own satisfaction, became more persistent. Mr. Penington, whom she had not seen for a day or two, was radiant with the delight of being near her again, and his pleasure sent a sort of answering glow into her own heart. It was impossible for her to remain untouched by the kind thoughtfulness with which he contrived to shield and leave her in peace, or by the swiftness with which he seemed to anticipate her wishes. Gradually he drew her out of her silence into an interest in the

curious things he had got together, and to promise to go to the Etruscan Museum in the Vatican to see the collection of cottage tombs, the curious little vessels like miniature hats which were dug out of an ancient burying place in the Campagna.

‘You shall go when you like,’ he said eagerly.

Mrs. Leyton, who was very warmly on Mr. Penington’s side, looked at her husband and smiled. She had noticed something different in Phillis’s manner that night, a more passive acquiescence, perhaps, from which she augured well. Really liking her, she would have been glad that the Roman winter should end in this satisfactory fashion, and was prepared even to go through the catacombs, if Mr. Penington proposed it, though she hated anything underground. Mr. Penington had learnt exactly the things which Phillis liked.

‘I have come round to your thinking about Titian’s picture in the Borghese,’ he said to her in a low voice, when the others were talking; ‘I think it is the best thing in all the gallery.’

‘In all Rome, I think,’ said Phillis brightening. ‘I care for it so much that it quite hurts me to hear people abuse it.’

‘Are you talking of the Sacred and Profane Love?’ asked Mrs. Leyton, chiming in. ‘Mr. Ibbetson could not make out which was which, don’t you remember? I can’t say it spoke very well for his artistic feeling.’

Somehow or other this little speech had a different effect from what was intended: it hurt Phillis, and though Mr. Penington did not know much about Jack’s position with her, he was watching her and saw that she was vexed. He said quietly—

‘That is not a very uncommon mistake at first sight, indeed, you may find it im-

mortalised in print. But at every fresh visit the marvellous beauty comes out. Very likely the name is altogether imaginary. Vanity and Modesty would do as well for it as for Da Vinci's picture in the Sciarra. You must come and see that one day, soon, Miss Grey ; I can get an order.'

'You can get everything, I believe,' said Phyllis with a smile.

He said quickly, so that only she could hear,—

'I like you to say so—I shall take it as an omen ;' and he then turned away, and talked for the rest of the evening to Mrs. Leyton. Phyllis leaned back in a kind of dream, thinking that friendship was pleasant and soothing, and wishing that others would be content with it. But they would not. And if—if only she could make up her mind to marry him, not only could she save him—this was what she thought—from the pangs of dis-

appointment, but her own unrest might perhaps be hushed into—contentment.

And yet she would not marry Jack without an equal love. Certainly Phillis could lay no claim to be what is called a consistent character.

CHAPTER X.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

AND so Miss Cartwright was laid in that peaceful cemetery at Rome where the sweet violets clamber over the graves, and the cypresses grow tall against the blue sky, throwing shadows alike on the Christian resting-place, and on the tomb of the old republican, who had himself enclosed in a pyramid of marble. They were obliged to shut Cartouche into a room from which there was no possible exit, or the dog would have forced his way after them ; and indeed, after they came back, Jack could hardly endure the questioning look of his eyes. As for Miss Preston, she could not pet him enough. She

asked Jack with tears in her eyes whether he would let her take him back to Florence, where she meant to return at once, not caring to remain in Rome ; but Jack would not part with the dog. For a week or two longer he intended to stay on in the house in the Via della Croce, for there were certain arrangements to make which made it necessary for him to be in Rome ; then he thought he would go back to his work in London, and if the prospect looked a little forlorn, he told himself that he must get used to it, and put his shoulder to the wheel. All his aunt's property had come to him, but this winter had also brought him a contempt of idleness, and it did not in any way modify his plans for his future life. He had seen Mrs. Leyton, and something, which she purposely let drop, had confirmed his impression that Phillis was lost to him. He could not quite give up hope, but told himself that time only

could answer his doubts, and meanw
thought with some reluctance of the
which must be undertaken before Pl
would feel satisfied that Bice knew
Oliver Trent had really acted.

Two days after the funeral, three pe
were standing in a room in the Palazzo C
poni, the windows of which looked int
square court-yard, round which ran a cove
way, and which for its centre had a sler
fountain, with camellias growing round
The room itself was certainly ugly. The
proportions were fine, and some good pictu
hung on the walls, but the panels, doors,
ceiling were painted heavily and in bad ta
while the furniture was hideously cove
with yellow satin. In the furthest wind
an old Italian servant with a brown
wrinkled face sat knitting, and turning
back to the three, who were Bice, Trent, and
young Moroni. It was to this last that E

was talking eagerly in his own language, paying no attention to Trent's looks of annoyance. At this moment the servant brought in a card.

'It is Mr. Ibbetson,' said Bice, after a moment's pause. 'Yes; of course we are at home to him.'

If her colour rose a little, Trent did not see it. He had expected this meeting, but no preparation could subdue the feeling of dismay which seized him. He said sharply,

'I hope you will not be anything of the sort. You ought not to admit him.'

'Do you suppose I will allow you to dictate to me?' she said, looking at Trent with flashing eyes.

'Your mother is not here,' he said, biting his lips.

'There is Brigitta.'

The servant had retired into the ante-

room ; Bice was moving towards him, when Trent placed himself before her.

‘Listen to reason,’ he said beseechingly. ‘I tell you I can’t promise to keep my temper with this man.’

‘And what do I care !’ she retorted. ‘Are you afraid of him ? I don’t suppose he comes to see you, and so if you like you can go away. Certainly I shall receive him.’

The girl had changed in some way or other. Her beauty was, if possible, more remarkable than ever, so large were her eyes, and so curved the lines of her mouth, but instead of the frank and open manner which had been as simple as that of a child, there was noticeable a touch of hard recklessness, of defiance which was almost like despair. Young Moroni, standing by, had also changed. He had grown older, and now looked from one to the other, understanding nothing of the words, but aware that some-

thing was amiss, and ready at a sign from Bice to fling himself upon the other man. He, poor fellow, was feeling as if all his old hopes had come to an end. Trent was very pale, but had recovered his coolness. He said scornfully,

‘No, I am not quite such a fool. I imagine the meeting will be less agreeable for him than for me, on the whole. But these knight-errants of yours, my dear Bice, should learn to conduct themselves less offensively when they meddle with what does not concern them. Pray, is this other also to take part in the coming interview?’

‘He will not be the wiser,’ said the girl indifferently. Her anger seemed to have died out, and she said a few careless words to Moroni, who brightened, nodded, and took a newspaper with him into a recess where he was half hidden by a heavy yellow curtain. Then she walked to the door and threw it

open. ‘Ask the English gentleman to come in,’ she said to the servant who was waiting, and came back to the middle of the room, flinging a triumphant and haughty glance at Trent.

As for him in these moments he had rapidly reviewed his position. Ever since he had heard of Ibbetson’s sudden arrival in Rome, he had known that this meeting must in all probability take place, and had prepared for it, thinking carefully over his chances, so that it did not take him by surprise, although he had had a faint hope of inducing Bice to refuse to see him. He had played a bold game, calculating that interest and the hope of regaining his uncle’s favour would keep Ibbetson in England, and managing to persuade Bice that he was misjudged from having really befriended Clive. What was she to think ! Clive’s own letters almost took his part ; she had already promised, and

was sick at heart, while her strong will failed in spite of its bold front. Trent had worked warily with her, and had all but won. But at this moment, though this flashed through his mind, and though he was well aware how perilous was his position and how much depended on his own coolness and audacity, he felt despairingly that he was not cool. He loved this girl so passionately that it irritated him almost beyond endurance to feel that the man he looked upon as his rival was eagerly welcomed by her in the face of his expressed wish. No dread of possible consequences fell upon him so painfully as this fact.

As for Bice her heart was beating fast, she did not know what she felt. When Jack came in she was standing alone in the middle of the room with all its heavy adornments. Somehow they only seemed to add to her beauty, which struck him as freshly as ever.

He greeted her kindly, and exchanged a stiff bow with Trent.

‘We have been so shocked and grieved,’ she said with eagerness. ‘I shall always feel as if she were the kindest person I have ever known.’

‘Thank you,’ Jack replied gravely. ‘I, for one, have good reason to say so.’

‘Did she suffer very much?’

‘At first. By the time I saw her it was more weakness than pain.’

‘And you were in time? We have heard very few particulars.’

‘Yes. I arrived the afternoon before.’

He was sitting next Bice on a sofa. Trent had flung himself on a chair, and taken up a book, but he was keenly on the watch. Bice, whose contemptuous mood had passed, looked at him nervously.

‘I thought that when you left Rome you intended to come back again? Why did you

stay all that time in England ?' she asked in a hesitating voice.

' I did intend to return when I left, but circumstances are sometimes too strong for intentions,' said Jack, feeling a comical conviction that he was growing sententious. Pope's line flashed through his mind: "And mark the point where sense and dulness meet." ' I hope the sense is equal to the dulness ' he thought.

' And you saw Clive ?'

She glanced at Oliver again as she put the question, but this time her looks were defiant. She thought that Ibbetson had gathered a false impression of what Trent had done ; at the same time she took a certain pleasure in introducing a subject which would perhaps irritate Trent. He at once accepted the challenge, laying down the book and saying in his soft tones :

' You need hardly put that question, Bice ;

Mr. Ibbetson not only saw Clive, but, as you know, made discoveries so new and startling, that if they had not had the misfortune to place me in a very unenviable light, I should really have been disposed to congratulate him upon their extraordinary ingenuity.'

'You would be giving me more credit than I deserve,' Jack replied calmly. 'My discoveries were so far from ingenious that I might have wondered at their results if I had not remembered an old saying.'

'Pray allow us to benefit.'

"You may go by different roads, and yet reach the same end."

Jack was getting irate at what he considered insolence, though he was ready to spare him if Bice made any sign.

'Most oracular. May I ask whether the application is intended for my use?' said Trent without any change of countenance.

But Ibbetson noticed that his hand which was resting on the arm of the chair, grasped it closely. He bent forward and answered,

‘Certainly I have no wish to be your fellow-traveller.’

Bice, who had been glancing doubtfully from one to the other, interposed.

‘You are not quite fair on Mr. Trent. Has it ever been explained to you? Oh, then, it is no wonder. He was deceived as well as poor Clive by that wicked man.’

‘Was he?’

‘Yes, indeed. What a friend for Clive to choose! Do you think he will be more careful now? Because, if not, I am sure he will be ruined.’

‘He has had a lesson, of course.’

‘And it was all through you that the man was found out. Imagine his telling you that he had repaid the money! I suppose he is too ill to be punished?’

‘He is dead,’ Ibbetson answered briefly.

‘Dead!’ she looked questioningly at him; something which he could not shut out of his manner, gave her suspicions. She said with her old imperativeness, ‘Why do you speak in such little sentences? Are you hiding something, or are you offended? Don’t you know that we can never, never, thank you enough?’

‘You don’t include me in your “we,” I hope,’ said Trent with a sharp change of voice.

‘Certainly personal relations need not be discussed between us,’ replied Jack haughtily. ‘May I ask how the history of the money continues after reaching this point?’

‘If it were not for this lady, I might decline to answer your questions,’ said Trent in the same tone. ‘She being present, and considering herself under obligations to you, I

will inform you that it does not continue at all. It ends with Mr. Smith.'

'Who is dead?'

'Who is dead.'

Surely there was some triumph in his voice.

'And therefore beyond the possibility of being called as a witness.'

'That may be your way of looking at the case. From my view I should say that he was beyond the possibility of being called to account for dishonesty.'

'Take care, Mr. Trent,' returned Jack gravely.

Oliver glanced swiftly at him, something in his face giving him a thrill of uneasiness. Then he looked at Bice; her eyes were fixed eagerly, inquiringly upon him, the breath came quickly through her parted lips as she leaned forward. The sight of these two, sitting side by side, maddened him.

· May I be permitted to ask to what your warning relates ?' he said with an attempt at scorn.

· Certainly. Do you wish me to enter into particulars now, or would you prefer them to be given in private ?'

Before Trent said 'Now,' he rapidly reviewed his chances. If he could have had a hope that Hobetson would not tell all to Bice, he would have chosen a private interview, but he felt certain that sooner or later she would be informed, and, therefore, determined to meet the charge boldly. Besides, he could see she would not be put off. And after all, was not his word as good any day as that wretched Smith's. He said, 'Now,' briefly.

'Then, to put it in the fewest possible words, I may tell you that, although Smith is dead, I have in my possession such strong and clear evidence of his having paid you

the money, that there would not be the smallest difficulty in proving it in a court of law.'

'Perhaps a receipt,' sneered Trent.

'No. But a deposition, taken when he knew himself dying, and signed in the presence of the clergyman and another witness.'

'Your court of law would require a little stronger evidence than this document, however interesting, Mr. Ibbetson.'

He still spoke without flinching.

'Oh, they would have it. The chain is very complete. There would be the evidence of the London landlady that she had furnished you with Smith's address and refused it to others by your advice. That of Clive that you denied all knowledge of it. And lastly that of the Broadwater lodging-house keeper that you saw Smith there on such a day. What took you there?'

‘What’s that to you?’ asked Trent firmly. But he was livid. Then suddenly changing his tone he turned imploringly to Bice, whose eyes were still fixed upon him, though she had drawn her hands tightly against her chest, and was shrinking backwards. ‘Bice! You at least will not believe this ridiculous slander. You and I both know that Clive would not listen to advice. I was very uneasy about him—for your sake, remember—could I have done him any harm? Perhaps I had better have treated him more openly, better for myself certainly it would have been, but I thought he would grow desperate, and lose all self-respect if I let him know that I knew his story to be false. It was for that reason that I never told him I had traced Smith. For Smith utterly denied it to me then. I believe now that he was lying, as, according to Mr. Ibbetson, he has lied about me, but at the time I took his word for his

statement. And then I lent Clive the money, calling it lending, but never intending to take it from him, only feeling that the effort of repaying it would make more impression than words. You understand this, Bice ?'

She did not answer his appeal. A mute horror seemed to have seized her. Ibbetson looked at her with more pity than she did, and bent his eyes on the ground as he went on.

' Finally, there is the man Elias Brooks.'

' What of him ? ' said Trent hoarsely.

' It is never safe to buy silence, because speech will always be ready for a higher bidder. Indeed, I doubt if you knew what most required hushing up. He was interested in your interview with Smith, and is prepared to repeat the greater part of it.'

' Confound you and him together,' said Trent, springing up. ' Are these your tools ? And you believe him ? '

‘Yes I do ; because the corroboration is exact.’

‘I shall expect satisfaction for these insults, Mr. Ibbetson.’ Oliver’s voice was choked.

‘Not really, I think,’ Jack said coolly.

‘Stop !’ interrupted Bice. She stood up, trembling so much that she had to rest her hand on the sofa. Trent’s eyes fell before hers which seemed to blaze with the fire of her indignation. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. ‘Go away, go !’ she said at last with a shudder.

He made a step towards her.

‘Bice, my darling, hear me !’

‘You could treat Clive like that !’

‘Let me explain——’

‘Not a word,’ she interrupted. She spoke in a strained high voice, but words had come back to her. ‘You have deceived me from first to last. I have never loved

you, but I thought you were good to Clive. Every day of my life I will thank God that He has saved me from becoming your wife. Do you hear? Now go.'

The scorn, the sweeping indignation of her voice startled them all. Brigitta looked round; Moroni, whom Jack had not seen until that moment, came hurriedly forward, and stood looking from one to another. Trent caught her hand.

'Take care!' he said in a sharp whisper; then, as she shook him off with such a vehement movement as that with which she would have flung some reptile from her, he went on desperately, 'Are you mad? I have borne a great deal, but I cannot bear everything. Have you forgotten that there are other ties between us besides those which you are so ready to cast off? Perhaps you wish your mother to be ruined. How is she to pay her debts?'

She had drawn herself to her full height, her face was very pale, her eyes seemed as if he must wither up before them. Then she laughed.

‘That is well, that is very, very well; I think it is the only thing that was wanted,’ she said, letting her words drop one by one. ‘Mr. Ibbetson, Giovanni, will you come and hear Mr. Trent’s last appeal, and my answer.’

Jack, who had turned away from a scene that pained him, and had been standing at the window, looking out at the court with its fountain, its camellias, and the rain splashing on its great paving stones, came back unwillingly. Moroni, hearing his name, though he understood nothing more, hastened forward and stood at Bice’s side, with a ready purpose in his eyes to do anything she could ask.

‘Not now,’ said Trent, drawing back.

‘Yes, now,’ she asserted. ‘Do you suppose I will ever look at your face again? Listen, then, both of you. We owe him money, and he threatens me with it—*He!* He supposes that even a prison would not be preferable to being his wife !’

As all the passion of her Italian nature leapt forth, the scorn in her voice might have swept him away before it, but that his own rage was ungovernable. He said with a sneer :—

‘Oh, I imagine you have taken care to arrange for something better than a prison. Pray, is this a preconcerted scene, and is Mr. Ibbetson to pay your debts and marry you ?’

Jack made a step forward, then he stopped himself by a strong effort. Trent had fallen beneath his punishment, he would not even speak to him ; he turned to Bice and said with great gentleness :—

‘I am very sorry you should have been exposed to this man’s gross insults, although they cannot touch you. Will you go to your room and leave him to me?’

‘Signorina, what is it? what has he done?’ asked Moroni, seizing her hands.

But the girl was speechless. Her eyes dilated, she was deadly pale, and looked like one who had received a heavy blow. Ibbetson, who was very much grieved, said a few words in Italian to Moroni.

‘But it is impossible! Does he dare to reproach you—you! because your mother owes him some money! It should have been a great honour to him to have been so happy as to do her a little service. Signorina, *carina*,’ cried the young fellow, with passionate entreaty in his voice, ‘I am rich, all that I have is yours!’ His face was glowing, he pressed her hands to his lips; in the eagerness of his devotion he seemed to

have forgotten that any others were in the room. ‘Only suffer me to act for you, I beseech of you !’

Trent came forward once more, and though his voice shook it had regained its old softness :—

‘ Bice ! ’

She turned away her head.

‘ I spoke hastily. Say one word.’

She remained silent, and Ibbetson turned sharply round.

‘ You had better go,’ he said, in a low voice.

‘ Why ? ’ asked Trent, eyeing him sullenly.

‘ I should think you could answer the question for yourself; perhaps before you find yourself kicked out.’

‘ Well, that spectacle is hardly pleasant for you or for me,’ said Oliver, pointing to Moroni, who stood close to Bice as if he were

her champion; ‘and so I leave you with greater satisfaction than might have been the case. But you have not heard the last of me, Mr. Ibbetson.’

He walked out of the room slowly, and except, perhaps, for the pallor of his face, no one would have guessed that he was a disgraced and disappointed man. There was a moment’s silence between them all when he had lifted the curtain and passed out, nothing breaking it except the patter of the rain on the stones of the courtyard, the click-click of old Brigitta’s needles, and the distant clang of some church bell. Moroni clenched his hands, and muttered something under his breath. Jack stood looking after Trent, uncertain what to do himself, whether to go or stay. He was roused from his thoughts by Bice’s voice :—

‘Is he gone?’

‘Yes; he is gone,’ said Jack, coming

back, and speaking gravely. 'I'm afraid this has been a very trying interview for you. Perhaps I ought to have managed that you should have been spared. And yet—'

'No, no,' she said faintly. 'You have nothing to reproach yourself with. It was better that it should have been like this; it was necessary. And you must not think that it is the sort of grief you would perhaps expect—is it very wicked to feel as I do, as if a burden were lifted off my life? Because I do feel it already in spite of his threats.'

'I am sure I don't wonder,' said Ibbetson kindly, 'I only wonder—'

'That I ever promised to marry him? Phillis would never have done so, I know, but then—I am not so brave as Phillis. And I always believed he was very good to Clive, and then he persuaded me that what

he had done had been misrepresented, and I thought it was from something I had said ; and so——'

'Signorina, do not shut me out any longer, talk in our own language,' said young Moroni impatiently.

The girl smiled ; a sad little smile it was. 'Poor Giovanni, whether you hear little or much, you believe always that I am right, don't you ?'

'*Altro, I know it, signorina !*'

She looked wistfully at him for a moment. Then she put out a hand to him and to Jack, with a simple confiding impulse which touched them both. 'Good-bye, dear friends,' she said softly in Italian, 'try always to think as kindly.'

As the heavy curtain fell behind her, Moroni turned impetuously to Ibbetson.

'Now, signore,' he said 'I must hear more.'

‘Wait a moment,’ said Jack. ‘Is it because you love her?’

‘Do I not? And I mean to win her. He is dismissed, is he not? Let me hear it all, I beseech you, I burn with impatience. I will walk back with you, and then I shall hasten to her mother. What is this about the money? Shall I not call out that Trent?’

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH WILL SUCCEED?

MORONI did not call out Trent but took some other measures which were vigorous and a good deal more sensible. But it was a proof of curious and dogged perseverance in the man, that, although baffled, Trent did not give up all hope. He had played a desperate game, in which he told himself—and truly enough, as far as it went—that he had been led on from risk to risk, and so far as his wrong-doing had been a mistake, he bitterly regretted it. Bitterly, for his love for Bice was an absorbing passion, and he would not yet suffer himself to own that she was lost for ever.

His hope lay in Mrs. Masters. First and last he had lent her a good deal of money, looking to it as another means of gaining a power over the girl. For he measured Bice's strength and weakness accurately, knowing that she would resist obstinately and, after all, give way in a moment if she could spare a tear to those she loved. Impulse, as yet, was almost paramount with her; what Trent was ignorant of, or forgot to take into account, was the effect produced upon her by the steady influence of such a life as that of Phillis, in which a higher law ruled.

Trent lost no time. He knew that Mrs. Masters had been teased by Kitty into taking her to the Capitol, and he at once followed them there. Everything looked grey and dreary, and unlike Rome; the pepper trees and mimosas by the Capitol steps hung dank, the poor wolf had slunk

sullenly into his den, even the majestic and unmoved serenity of Marcus Aurelius, as the rain beat down upon him, dangerously approached the ridiculous. An old woman held out her hand, '*Un soldo, per pietà, signore, un soldo.*' Trent flung her a dozen soldi, having a feeling that he could not afford to lose the blessing of a beggar.

Mrs. Masters and Kitty had gone to the side where the bronze wolf is preserved, and he was not long in finding them. Mrs. Masters—always provided with a camp-stool—was in her usual condition of repose, letting her daughter look about as she liked, so that nothing could have been more desirable for Trent. Any other woman might have noticed the unusual dull pallor of his face, as he leaned against a pedestal by her side, but observation was growing more and more an unknown exercise to her, and she made no more than her ordinary remarks about heat

or cold and the like, when he joined her. He did not trouble himself to answer them, but said abruptly :—

‘Have you any idea how much money I have let you have?’

‘Not much,’ she said placidly. It had seemed to her part of the arrangement to which belonged Bice’s engagement, and she expected Trent to look upon it in the same light.

‘Well, you had better understand. It is over two hundred pounds.’

For a moment she was a little startled, ‘I don’t really think it can be so much,’ she said. ‘But, to be sure, I have a very poor head for business.’

‘And do you know,’ he went on without regarding, ‘that Bice has been listening to that young—fool, Ibbetson, and has been talked into throwing me over?’

He spoke in a low savage voice, which

had in it so much concentrated bitterness that it frightened her. She looked up at him with a vaguely terrified expression.

‘What do you mean?’ she said. ‘She is going to marry you, isn’t she?’

‘No,’ he said in the same tone. ‘Can’t you understand plain English? I tell you he has been getting hold of her with his cock-and-bull stories about Clive, and this is the end of it.’

He had no dislike to Mrs. Masters, and yet at that moment it gave him a fierce satisfaction to see that she was trembling. It seemed like an assurance that Bice was still in his power. And, indeed, one time of her life had taught her so thoroughly the language of threats that she had no difficulty in realizing that he meant something by asking her about the money. She said imploringly:—

‘But it is not my fault, Oliver. You

must know that I have always taken your part with Bice, and that I cannot help it if she has one of these headstrong fits upon her.'

'Perhaps not. But I don't mean to put up with them quietly. Choose for yourself. Can you repay me the money ?'

'Oh, of course I cannot, you know I cannot ! And you promised me that when you were married you would not ask for repayment.'

'Well ? And I abide by that promise. But do you think me fool enough to lose everything ? Keep your side of the compact and I keep mine.'

She looked at him helplessly. Her mind was not quick at resources, and Trent's will always seemed to oppose a blank high wall when she wished to escape. Kitty came up with some remark. When she had left them again, her mother said slowly :—

‘I can’t force Bice.’

‘You can work upon her. If you succeed, I give you my word, the money shall be absolutely yours.’

He was leaning forward and speaking earnestly, and a dull hope came into her face.

‘Perhaps I can. And you will be kind?’

‘I will be very kind—to success.’

Then he walked away after Kitty, who was his warm admirer and supporter, and took pains to make himself more than usually pleasant to her, before he confided what had past. Painted in his own colours it looked very different from the actual fact, and Kitty, flattered and pleased, scarcely needed persuasion. When he went back to Mrs. Masters, he felt convinced that he had a chance of at least getting himself heard by Bice, who was only to be reached by those she loved, and once heard, his indomitable

perseverance assured him that he could explain everything.

Somebody else was plotting and planning that day. Moroni, all the chivalry of whose nature had risen up in answer to what Ibbetson had told him, though that was not much, was dashing about here and there, looking pale and determined, and unlike the days of the guitar. Jack was very good-natured, and sincerely anxious that he should succeed, his liking and esteem for the young fellow having grown rapidly that day. But even Jack grew a little weary of giving advice, when, for the third time, Moroni came rushing up his stairs.

‘My dear friend,’ cried the young fellow, wringing his hands, ‘what should I do without you? I ask you twenty thousand pardons, I am an impertinent, an intruder, but—will you only answer me one question, and I go?’

Ibbetson, who had had to answer some dozens already, nodded good-humouredly.

‘Do you really think I should delay pressing my suit? If she were altogether Italian I should know what to do, but she is partly English; she loves England, it is not impossible that I might shock her. You, too, are English. Advise me.’

He was trembling with eagerness, and thrusting his hands into his hair. Ibbetson leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head, and said:—

‘I wouldn’t be too abrupt. She will want a little breathing time after this affair. See Mrs. Masters if you like, and for the rest go quietly to work.’

Moroni listened as eagerly as if he had not already had the advice again and again, nodded once or twice and jumped up.

‘Enough! I shall go at once and see if her mother is returned. *Addio, best of*

friends.' But at the door he came back :
' You would really wait ? '

' My dear fellow, I'm no prophet. I only say what I should do if I were in your shoes.'

' I shall do it. Ah, a thought strikes me ! That is your dog, is it not ? And she likes him, I have heard her speak of him—will you lend him to me ? It would be so good to give her pleasure.'

Jack gave a laughing leave, but Cartouche refused all enticements. When the eager young fellow, with his hope and enthusiasm, had at last rushed out, Cartouche walked across the room and rested his black head on his master's knee ; looking in his face with the odd questioning that touched them all. ' You and I are left pretty much to each other, old fellow, eh ? ' said Jack, pulling the shaggy locks ; ' and we miss her, too, don't we ? Well, we'll hold together, and stick to

each other, and, perhaps, the sooner we get away from here the better it may be for us both.' Then he began to imagine that future which turned a dreary side towards him at that time; Phillis in the vicarage at Whitcote, himself obliged every now and then to be at Elmsleigh to meet her, to meet the man whose wife she was. More than once in their last interview Phillis had hurt him as she had never done before; her shrinking reluctance to grant him that one request of his, had given him his sharpest pang, and his thoughts had gone back to it again and again. He was impatient with himself for his own folly, and stood up and shook himself, as if by that means he could get rid of it. Miss Preston and Winter had both gone, the porter's wife kept his rooms, and his food was sent from a *trattoria*. Hardly ever had he been oppressed with such a sense of loneliness in the world, and somehow he was sure

that Cartouche shared the oppression. The sooner he could get back to London the better, and he made a rapid calculation, and decided that in five days he might leave Rome. If, before then, he came across Phillis, well and good ; but he told himself dejectedly that he must not try to see her alone, where another repulse would only pain them both. Friends they might be in time, but it is not a relationship which succeeds very easily to that of lovers, in spite of the fine words talked about it, or even the finer thoughts thought.

Moroni, meanwhile, went like a whirlwind to the Palazzo Capponi, and stormed Mrs. Masters in the very yellow room where he had already been that day. Other people might have found it difficult to introduce the subject, but his simplicity and his eagerness saw no difficulties. He kissed her hand, and held it in his own while he said :—

‘ Dear signora, I have the greatest favour to ask. By what I hope may be a fortunate incident, I was in this room to-day, and saw the signorina act like a heroine. The Signor Trent is of your family, I believe, so I say nothing, I abstain to speak of him, if I did——however, I do not; as I say, I abstain. But I gathered that—he being of your family—you had done him the great honour to permit him to be your banker. I am right, am I not ? ’

Poor Mrs. Masters, who was unaccustomed to have her monetary transactions looked upon in this light, stared helplessly at him. She was feeling the pressure of Trent’s heavy hand, and dreading her interview with Bice, which might, she knew, turn out a failure. And if so, where would she be ? But Moroni was afraid he had offended her.

‘ You think I have no right,’ he said, with

a gesture of despair. ‘Ah, forgive me, but remember, are we not of your oldest friends? Who will you permit to be of some little use, when inconveniences occur, but us? If I cannot speak of that man, it is impossible for me to express myself as I would, but I entreat you to leave it in my hands, to let me settle everything with him. Oh, I will be patient because he is your countryman. And the money shall come from you, you may trust me.’

Was this the favour he was asking? She could scarcely believe that she heard rightly, and that her perplexities could meet with such a gentle end. No scruples were likely to weigh with her. She sank into an arm-chair with a sigh of relief.

‘Would you really do me this kindness, Giovanni? Oliver Trent has behaved cruelly, for I did not know I had to repay the two hundred; but he is angry with Bice

and vents it upon me. It is very hard on me. But have you the money ?'

'Listen, dear signora. I came here hoping to gain your consent to address myself to the signorina Beatrice. My father loves me, he is rich, he consents. I find her tied to this man. Imagine, if you can, my despair. But now I shall hope again, with your permission, I shall have every hope.'

'Oh, you have my permission,' said Mrs. Masters, slowly. 'But if she will not—'

'Do you think she will not ? Do not say so, I implore you !'

'She is incomprehensible,' said her mother, with a sigh. 'And then, perhaps, I shall have all this scene with the money over again.'

Moroni stared at her, grew pale and drew himself up with a grand air they had never seen in him.

‘Signora, I am one of the Moroni,’ he said proudly, ‘and I have asked two favours at your hands.’

She looked at him in wonder. Was this Bice’s boy-admirer, at whom they had sometimes laughed? It touched and shamed her.

‘You are very good, my Giovanni; very good,’ she said. ‘I hope poor Bice will have the blessing of so good a husband, if she really has made up her mind not to marry Oliver. Poor Bice! Perhaps she has thought too much of me and of others—and as for this you wish to do, I cannot thank you enough—’

‘Say no more,’ said the young man, radiant, and seizing her hand again in his fervour. ‘You have granted me permission, now I shall go to work very carefully. But you will never let her know of the favour you have given me, she would think it too

presumptuous. Within an hour the money shall be here. How kind you have been to me, dear signora !'

The secret was one which Mrs. Masters determined to keep.

When she went into Bice's room, she found her pacing up and down, flushed and feverish.

'So you have seen that man,' the girl began vehemently; 'Mamma, for pity's sake say nothing about him. Kitty has gone away crying because I will not listen. I shall go mad, I believe—I cannot even tell you what he has done. Ask Mr. Ibbetson. Only I will not marry him, whatever you owe him; are human beings to be sold like that in these days? Let us go back, I will work, I will—'

'My dear, you are so impetuous! I do not wish you to marry him.'

Bice paused in her rapid movements.

‘And the money?’ She asked the question breathlessly.

‘The money will be paid to-day.’

The change in her face seemed to light the very room. She flung her arms round her mother’s neck, tears were running down her face. ‘It is for joy,’ she sobbed. ‘Do you mean that we are free, that he can do nothing more?’ But after this she made none of the inquiries which her mother dreaded; sitting quietly, and looking out of the window, and every now and then drawing a long breath, as if a burden were lifted from her.

That evening a great bouquet came for the Signorina Capponi.

The next morning, as Moroni was again going to choose the best flowers he could find for his lady, Trent passed by him on his way to the station. He looked like what he was; a man who had aimed for an object

and had lost it. Of Moroni he took no notice ; it was Ibbetson to whom he attributed his defeat. But Moroni in the joy of his heart, bought a magnificent peacock made entirely of flowers, at which the Roman world had been staring for an hour or two, and gave orders for its being sent to Palazzo Capponi. And Jack, when he was called upon for advice that day, thought Giovanni's views as to proceeding slowly were a good deal modified. At any rate, he saw Bice.

CHAPTER XII.

FATHER TIBER.

THE carnival had ended and Lent begun with days of heavy and unusual rain. People who were bent upon sight-seeing were obliged to fall back upon the galleries and studios, and these were so dark that the general gloom seemed to have also affected them. One day, five or six people were wandering through Vertumni's beautiful rooms. There are hangings of strange colours, damasks, tapestries, draperies over the doors, priceless bits of glass or bronze, out of the midst of which rich and soft surroundings the pictures glow. Sometimes it is Italy—the gloom of the Pontine marshes,

the light of Pæstum. Sometimes you lose yourself in a sea-mist where a boat floats between sky and earth ; sometimes meet with Egypt's dusky radiance, or the sweep of the sand on the desert. . . .

Mrs. Leyton was in her element, she went on from room to room, dragging her husband and the Peningtons after her. She wished Phyllis to marry Mr. Penington, but it would have annoyed her very much if she had absorbed him, which was quite another thing. And Phyllis preferred to linger behind with Bice, who wandered restlessly from picture to picture. She touched one of the broad and deeply carved black frames with a slender finger, and went on with what she had been saying :—

‘ Did you ever know what it was to have a ton-weight lifted off you ? But you needn’t answer. To get my sort of ton you must pull it on yourself, and you couldn’t do that.

You would never have more than a pound at most. Only now the feeling is so delightful that it is almost worth all the past unhappiness to have got it. Everything seems different, even you !'

Phillis was looking at her curiously. Was not some hope added to this feeling of relief ? The girl, who had told Phillis all her story, went on :—

‘ But do you know that I have been afraid to ask questions. How has it all been managed ? Who can have set us free ? Poor mamma never could raise the money, that I know, and therefore somebody has done it, and I dare not make her tell me. What do you think ? ’

What could Phillis say ? No doubt rested in her own mind as to who it was had paid the debt, and set the girl free from the last links of that miserable bondage.

Jack had told her something of the scene

which had taken place at the Palazzo Capponi, and had found it impossible to restrain a certain satisfaction and triumph over its conclusion. Phillis held her own opinion that it was he to whom the finishing touch was due, but it was not an opinion which she would have suggested to Bice for worlds. She turned her back to look at some Indian hanging of wonderful texture, hoping that she might not be asked that question again. But Bice intended to have an answer.

‘Why don’t you speak?’ she said quickly. ‘What are you thinking about? Not——?’

She paused as if expecting some continuation of this ‘not.’ Phillis, however, took no notice. If Bice guessed she could not help it, but she would not suggest the name which seemed to her ridiculously palpable. There was a little pause in which they could hear Mrs. Leyton’s laugh in the next room.

When Bice began to speak again it was in a slow strained voice.

‘Did you really suppose it was Mr. Ibbetson?’ she demanded, ‘and did you really think that I should take it from him? I tell you I know as well as if he stood before us, and swore it, that he would not have dared to offer me such an insult, and sooner than accept it I would—I would almost marry Oliver Trent.’

Phillis was astonished. Perhaps she had not credited the girl with so much delicacy of feeling, perhaps she thought that of all men, Jack was the one from whom Bice would have been the most ready to accept an obligation.

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said with great meekness. ‘It really was Mr. Ibbetson of whom I had thought, because he had already shown great interest——’

She stopped. Bice finished the sentence very calmly.

‘In Clive, yes, He was very good to Clive. Very good indeed.’

Phillis was staring at her. ‘Clive! He didn’t know Clive when he went to England. Don’t you know that he went on purpose to see him? Has he never so much as told you? He went to see him, but he went on your account.’

While she spoke the girl’s face had flushed a soft and delicate colour, but she still kept her eyes fixed upon Phillis. And when Phillis had ended she said:—

‘No, I don’t know it, and I don’t believe it. If Mr. Ibbetson went on our account, it was because you asked him. Did you not ask him?’

‘I told him,’ Phillis said, a little bewildered at this view of the matter which had never before presented itself to her. Bice looked at her wistfully and smiled.

‘Yes, you told him. Are you blind,

Phillis? Don't you see that the one thing which Mr. Ibbetson cares about is to do something to please you?'

It was Phillis's turn to colour, and she would have attempted some disclaimer, but that the rest of the party came back to the room, and Mrs. Leyton made a prompt attack upon them.

' You are disgracefully idle, you two! Come, acknowledge that I am the most consistent sight-seer of our party. However much I protest beforehand, when I am dragged to anything I *do* it.'

' I did not imagine that you were ever dragged anywhere, Mrs. Leyton,' said Mr. Penington, smiling. ' I should have called you a very cheerful conductor. However, I agree with you that it would be a pity for Miss Grey to miss those Egyptian pictures. Won't you come and see them?' he said, addressing her.

‘Not now, thank you,’ said Phillis hurriedly. He looked disappointed, and she was sorry; but Bice’s words were in her ears, she could scarcely think of anything else. Vague doubts had haunted her since her last interview with Jack; she had been really ashamed to own their presence to herself, but now to have them put into words by another brought a delicious thrill of happiness.

‘Well, good people,’ said Mrs. Leyton, ‘if this is finished, will you be kind enough to inform me what we are to do with ourselves? It is so early in the day that hours upon hours remain on my conscience. Make a suggestion, everybody, please, and then we can choose.’

‘I must go home,’ said Bice. ‘Suppose you come with me?’

‘Suppose we go and look at the Tiber?’ suggested Mr. Penington. ‘Do you know

that there are serious fears of an inundation ? At any rate I can assure you that it is worth seeing. The old stream swings along with a force absolutely amazing, and if you are not afraid of the rain, it would not take long to get as far as the Ripetta. There you would get a first-rate view.'

He addressed Mrs. Leyton, but he looked at Phillis. Captain Leyton, who was peering into a picture, turned round briskly.

'That's the thing to do, of course. Why didn't we think of it ? Come along.'

'Well, perhaps it is nice,' said 'his wife doubtfully. 'But we must call at the hotel and get waterproofs.'

'Nothing easier.'

'And I won't be led into any danger, mind.'

Bice still persisted that she must go back, indeed she was sufficiently Italian to think with horror of walking in the rain. At the foot of the stairs young Moroni was waiting,

rather to everybody's astonishment ; but he only said simply that he had heard the Signorina Capponi was here, and had come to see if he could be of any use.

‘What does he expect to do?’ Bice whispered to Phillis. But she was smiling.

The four ladies drove to the Alemagna, while the gentlemen walked, and then Bice went home alone, and the others fitted themselves out for their little expedition. Just as they came down, ready to start, Jack Ibbetson, with Cartouche at his heels, turned into the entrance passage.

‘The Tiber is rising,’ he said eagerly. ‘West tells me the sight out by the Ponte Molle is very striking. It struck me some of you might like to go there.’

‘Well, yes,’ said Captain Leyton, pulling his whiskers. ‘We *were* going to the Ripetta, but I don’t know—suppose we make a bolder push. What do you say, Miss Penington?’

‘I think it would be much nicer,’ she said with great emphasis.

‘Then we’ll do it.’

‘You’ll come?’ said Jack, turning quickly to Phillis.

It seemed to her afterwards as if she had been swept away by some impetuous force in his voice or manner. Was it the vibration of those words which she still heard, ‘Are you so blind? Don’t you see that the one thing he cares for is to please you?’ Was it true—at last?

But the arrangement did not at all please Mrs. Leyton. She said in an injured tone:—

‘I think you are excessively disagreeable. You know I can’t walk all that way.’

‘We can drive some distance.’

‘Oh, I daresay! I should have miles to tramp. And I had made up my mind to go to the Ripetta. Mr. Penington, do you intend to desert me, also?’

What could he say? He said 'No,' with a good deal of disappointment in the word. For the last few days it had seemed impossible to get any special sight or hearing of Phillis, and he had made this opportunity with the hope of speaking some words on which it seemed to him that the happiness of his life depended. It was hard to lose it. But Mrs. Leyton had no intention of letting him go with them.

'No, I thought not,' she said cheerfully. 'And I'm not sure that it isn't a good plan to separate. One can see things better. We'll meet by and by, and tell our experiences, if there is anything left of you, after this mad proceeding. But I predict we shall have the best of it.'

'That's all right, then,' said Captain Leyton cheerfully. 'Penington will take you, wife, and we four will start at once. Are you ready, good people?—thick boots, wraps, umbrellas?'

They would not consent so much as to be driven to the Porta del Popolo, and, indeed, the rain was no longer falling with the persistent force of the last few days. The sky was still heavy with leaden-looking clouds, but they were thinner, and in some places so far rent asunder that a glimmering brightness showed behind them. Coming along the Babuino was a picturesque file of donkeys of various ages, led by bronzed men in long blue cloaks ; a contadina, also in a blue dress, and a little child, walked by their side. Presently they met other processions ; goats, ox-carts piled high with household goods ; the poor oxen came stumbling and sliding along over the slippery stones, the people looked dejected, they were straggling in from the campagna, escaping from the threatened inundation. Jack spoke to one woman and asked a question. '*Mariaccia, che tempo !*' she exclaimed, holding up her hands. 'Already

much has been swept away. If it goes on, we shall be ruined.' The Via Flaminia was full of these fugitives, but they could not tell them much.

And as yet they saw nothing of the river.

Ordinarily, indeed, they must have reached the Ponte Molle itself before they would catch a glimpse of the yellow waters, and the tears sprang into Phillis's eyes as she remembered how about a month before she had driven out there with Miss Cartwright, and had stopped on the bridge to look at the loveliness of the view. Then, under a blue sky, even Tiber himself had caught all sorts of fair and delicate reflections ; that indescribable golden brown which takes the place of green in a Roman landscape, lay on the banks and on the stretching campagna ; a little watch-tower rose on a low hill above the river, and all along the line of distance ran a line of mountains flushed with tender

lights of rosy lilac, and crowned with snow. It was very unlike that day. For now the mountains were blotted out by the darkness of grey mist, and if for a moment this was lifted up, it was only a shadowy gloom which grew out of the greyness ; and before they reached the bridge, they could see the angry and tawny waters rolling towards them, at the very top of the confining banks—nay, here and there they had already forced a gap and spread themselves in a turbid sheet over the short grass. People were standing on the bridge, pointing ; but not many, the greater number had something to do, some danger to avert. For those who looked, the sight could hardly be forgotten. A fierce purpose seemed to possess the dark mass of rushing water which rolled with incredible swiftness beneath the bridge, and every now and then there swirled past a scarcely distinguishable heap of something which the old river had

already seized upon for his prey—branches of trees, bundles of maize, a struggling sheep, the spoil of some little farm, the torn ribs of a boat. Something in the vagueness of these objects, in the suddenness with which they were swept into and out of sight, in the triumphant might of the swollen river, had a horrible fascination for the lookers-on. What might not meet their eye next? They bent over the parapet and looked down; Cartouche sprang upon it and whined uneasily.

‘Some houses must have been washed away, for the last thing was a chair,’ said Miss Penington.

‘I can’t stand this,’ said Jack, straightening himself. ‘Whatever came down, we couldn’t possibly do any good here. I shall go further down the river. There are one or two places where if anything living were swept, it might be caught and held. At any rate it won’t look quite so desperate as it

does from the bridge. Leyton, you will see them home.'

'No, no,' said Phyllis with great eagerness. 'That is quite impossible. Do you suppose that we should let you go alone? Of course we will all go. I shall be giddy if I look at this much longer.'

And though she was generally the most considerate of companions, she did not once ask Miss Penington her wishes in the matter. Captain Leyton looked doubtful.

'I don't know what sort of a path there may be,' he said.

'But I do,' said Jack with a happy smile. 'If you'll really come, I can take you quite safely; the rain has stopped. Will you and Miss Penington go in front and I'll direct you.'

'I should have thought the shortest plan would have been for you to go in front yourself,' said Captain Leyton; but he fell into

Jack's arrangement, being the most good-natured of men.

'You have thick shoes, I hope?' said Jack to Phillis, as they followed.

'Look!' And she held up a pretty foot well protected. Phillis's spirits were rising every moment, in spite of the wild scene all about them. The path was very wet and rough; once or twice he put out his hand to help her. Perhaps the little action brought back to her mind another rough road when he had helped, not her, but Bice, for she said suddenly, 'I want to ask you a question; but you needn't answer it unless you like.'

'That is very considerate,' said he smiling.

'Do you know the end of Mrs. Masters's debts?'

'Yes, I do. That is, I know they've been paid. Do you expect this to be the end?'

‘Oh, well, for the present. But who paid them?’

He hesitated. ‘I don’t believe it’s a secret,’ he said presently, ‘but of course it’s not a thing to be talked about.’ Then he suddenly turned and looked down into her face. ‘Did you really suppose it was I?’

‘Why not?’ she persisted. ‘Why not you as well as another?’

‘I think I shall avail myself of your means of escape, and refuse to answer the question,’ said Jack with gravity. ‘I can’t afford to lose my one opportunity of being considered a *preux chevalier*.’

‘But, Jack!’

‘But, Phillis!’

‘Was it really not you?’

He did not answer her for a moment. Their path led them so close to the sweeping current of the river, already brimming over and tearing at the canes which bordered it,

that he was seized with a fear that he had been mistaken in the strength of the banks, and had, perhaps, brought his companions into danger. But a short recollection assured him that they were safe. He pointed out an oozy bog to Phillis that she might avoid it, and then said :—

‘I don’t think that Miss Capponi shares your misconception.’

‘No, she does not,’ said Phillis frankly. ‘But she doesn’t know where the money came from.’

‘Does she not?’ Jack lifted his eyebrows with a little incredulity. ‘Then I really think I ought to give you a hint to be used for her special benefit. But it seems to me that the blindness of the world is one of its chief wonders. Why, Phillis, can’t you see that young Moroni would think all he had well thrown away if he could get her?’

‘Young Moroni! I fancied that was quite a hopeless devotion.’

‘Not so hopeless now, I imagine. He had hard work to bring his father to his way of thinking, then he came here and found Trent to the fore; but now —’

‘When did he make you his confidant?’ asked Phillis quickly.

‘On the day of the great blow up: I acted as interpreter, and then had to hear all his hopes and fears. And I wish him full success.’

Jack had leapt across a little running stream, and held out his hand to Phillis, looking into her eyes as he did so. What did he read there? What new happiness trembled in their brown depths, what deep and tender faithfulness did he discover? Was this the moment at last for which he had longed and hoped?

‘Ibbetson! Ibbetson, for Heaven’s sake, what’s that?’

The cry came from Captain Leyton, who was running back and pointing eagerly towards the river.

‘Where?’ shouted Jack, eager in his turn.

‘There! Caught by that great tree.’

There is a point where the higher part of the bank juts out a little towards the river. Ordinarily this does not reach or interfere with the course of the water, only breaking into the line of pebbly reaches and of almost a thicket of bushes between them. But now the rage and fulness of the river swept high above bushes and reaches, and rushed along the inner bank which yet formed a barricade to its force, so that this little outpost was exposed to the full fury of the stream. Already it had been so battered and weakened, that more than half had been washed away.

but still it formed a little natural breakwater, and, as the current apparently set in its direction, it followed that some of those things, which Tiber had relentlessly wrenched from the land, now and then caught on its point and lingered for perhaps a minute or two before they were again whirled away to their doom. But now a larger object had been driven against it, and was making a more obstinate resistance. A great uprooted tree, tossed wildly along by the turbulent stream, had probably been swept against this barrier with such force as to become partially embedded in it. For the moment it remained there, and its long network of boughs, broken and battered as they were, stretched themselves out across the waters with what looked like despairing efforts against its destroyer. They could not last. The tawny river leapt and foamed, seizing branch and twig, and tearing them off with a violence which was

rapidly undermining the little promontory itself, and would soon sweep it and all that clung to it away. Meanwhile the branches caught at other spoil, wisps of poor drowned hay wrapped themselves round them, a contadino's hat with the gay ribbons all dank and draggled was tossed on to a splintered bough ; and Captain Leyton and his companion, watching the strange medley and the signs of ruined homesteads which the flood was sweeping down, had seen another object which struck them with horror, and made them cry out to Jack.

For caught in its narrow end by the branches into which it had been jammed, with the other end swung violently from side to side by the yellow surging waves which claimed their prey, was a wooden cradle ; and although they could not be sure—owing to the tossing unrest of the waters—whether it was or was not empty, it seemed to them,

every now and then, as though they caught sight of a little dark head, a darker shadow under the shadow of the cover. Jack was on the alert in a moment.

‘We must get hold of it somehow.’

‘If we can,’ said Captain Leyton doubtfully. ‘But think of the force of that current!’

Jack nodded, but by this time was already standing without coat or boots on the spot where the little promontory curved out from the bank.

They all knew something of the danger. At his quietest Tiber is no ordinary river, very rarely do you see a boat upon his surface, and the ferries have ropes stretched across, by which to bear up against the slow but mighty force of the old river.

And now he had done all this mischief higher up, and was within an ace of flooding

Rome. What could live in those sweeping and turbulent eddies ?

‘For Heaven’s sake don’t be so mad, Ibbetson !’ said Captain Leyton, laying a hand on his arm. ‘It’s hopeless to attempt to save the poor little beggar—utterly hopeless ! If anything could be done, I wouldn’t say a word, but this is only throwing away life. Don’t, my dear fellow, don’t !’

Miss Penington broke into terrified appeals. Phillis, pale as death, was standing by Jack’s side, looking into his face, but not attempting to dissuade him. Perhaps he did not hear Captain Leyton ; he was looking coolly and thoughtfully at the river as if to take in all the chances. A wave dashed up over their feet. Then he suddenly stooped down and kissed Phillis, held her, and gazed into her eyes for a moment. ‘God bless you, Phillis,’ he said. Afterwards he did not look back.

For a few steps he walked along the top of the bank, sinking each instant into its yielding surface, until, as the water swept over it more and more, he let himself down by its inner side, and half swimming, half clinging, gained a little ground, though slowly. This was the easiest part of all, but one danger at least was as great here as elsewhere. Every instant added to the insecurity of the bank. Every moment it seemed almost a miracle that it should be left. So terrific, indeed, was the force of the current that it swept Ibbetson backwards and forwards against it like a battering ram, and these very blows were an additional peril. Still he was able to battle on, those on the bank watching with agonizing anxiety; Cartouche running backwards and forwards, whining uneasily, looking in their faces, looking at the water.

'He has reached the tree,' Captain Leyton said in a breathless whisper.

It was the second stage. With it began the worst dangers of all, those of the undercurrents which naturally the bank had checked. He was obliged now to trust altogether to swimming, using the boughs as a support. Without them he must inevitably have been swept away, but their help was of the most frail and treacherous nature—tossed by the waters, swayed to and fro, twisted off and whirled into the centre of the flood, at any moment liable to be altogether detached from the bank, or with it to share a common destruction. Jack did not know it, but his face was bleeding from the twigs which whipped continually against it. Still the cradle was there, so near that it almost seemed to those on shore that he could have reached it, ignorant as they were of the terrible forces against which he was battling, or

worst of all, of the feeling each moment that he must be sucked under in a resistless eddy.

Were they moments or hours that passed? Phillis, on the shore, fell down on her knees and held up her hands, but never for an instant did her eyes let go that spot in the yellow waters where he was fighting for life. Presently Captain Leyton drew a long breath, and spoke again.

‘He has got the cradle. He is pushing it back.’

Then there was silence, that strained, intense silence, which is almost awful in its weight. Inch by inch, as it were, and only inch by inch, he came towards them, bruised, bleeding, hampered with the cradle. Once or twice it seemed as if he had disappeared. And, at last, just as he reached the point where the bank—by this time yet feebler—began, they heard—with an agony which to

Phillis in her helplessness was like that of death—his cry for help.

That moment Captain Leyton was in the water. How he got there he never knew, but before him there was another friend at least as faithful. Cartouche, at his master's cry, had plunged in, and, swimming bravely, had seized the cradle and turned back to land. With a tremendous struggle he managed to bring it to the spot where Phillis was standing, disregarding the water which washed up round her, and when she had lifted it out, the brave dog turned round and fought his way again to his master.

Help was indeed needed, for Jack's failure did not altogether arise from exhaustion, but from, if possible, a more serious cause. His foot had become entangled in some of the small submerged branches, and not having sufficient strength to extricate himself, he could only manage to keep himself afloat by

clutching at a bough. But the support was too slender to avail him long, against the dreadful power of the undercurrents, even if the tree itself were not—as would surely be the case in a few minutes—swept down the stream. Captain Leyton, although he had bravely plunged in, was too inexperienced a swimmer to give any help, indeed his own situation was full of danger before he had so much as reached the tree, and only by clutching at some projection in the bank with the despair of a drowning man could he keep his head above water.

But Cartouche? Through the tossing waters the dog, with a faithfulness which never faltered, struggled slowly back to his master. Beaten by the waves, with safety close behind within his reach, he needed no call to keep him resolute to his purpose. To Jack, with the river hissing in his ears, with the angry dash of foam blinding his eyes, the

sight of that black and curly head coming steadily towards him seemed to give hope and power once more. As the dog reached him he bent his head down, and Cartouche by a great effort licked his face. Then Jack called all his failing strength together ; the tree itself swayed violently, he felt that he was free. Free, but could he reach the shore ? The horror of that frightful imprisonment was so strong, that he dared not trust to the help of the branches, and the struggle was almost superhuman. Cartouche swam close to him, swam round him, more than once when he thought he must give up, the gaze of those faithful eyes, the touch of the dog's body, brought back the hope which had all but deserted him—and now, he had just cleared the roots of the tree, was just venturing in towards the bank, when, caught in some tremendous eddy, the tree swung completely round, and with its bare branches

tossing wildly upwards, the old river whirled away its prey in triumph.

A few moments sooner and Jack must have been drawn into the whirlpool. He had just escaped it, was just able to reach Captain Leyton, to give him help, to let the river, more merciful at the last, fling him where even a woman's hands could succour. The two men were saved; when Jack opened his eyes, the woman he loved was bending over him, her eyes looked into his with an unutterable gladness. God had given him back, and with his life had given him Phillis.

But Cartouche?

He had been a little behind his master; a bough had struck him down as it swept round, a fierce current drew him under, a moment did it all. The faithfulness which never once had failed him, had not failed him now; Jack was safe, but Cartouche had died in the saving.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONLY A DOG.

ONLY a dog. Other people said this afterwards, but not one of those who stood by the river, looking sadly where he had been carried away. Only a dog, indeed, and yet without his aid three of their number might never have been given back to those who loved them. Down Phillis's face the tears were raining.

‘Is it hopeless?’ she said.

‘Quite hopeless,’ Jack replied in a dull and shaken voice. ‘I would give—well it’s no use talking about what I would give——’

And then they turned away. It was indeed necessary that the two men, in their

chilled and dripping state, should get home as quickly as possible. And what of the little waif whose rescue had cost them so much? Phillis stooped down, and lifted her from the cradle which had been an ark, and in which she was sleeping as soundly as on her mother's breast.

'I will carry her,' said the girl with a sob.

As they walked—silent and moved with many feelings—along the bank which would lead them back to the road, the sinking sun, which had been hidden for many days, broke out from behind a drifting mass of clouds, and flooded the whole scene with a sudden golden glory. The angry and turbid waters were transfigured by its radiance; here and there where they had spread themselves in desolating tracts, all the brilliance of the heavens seemed to be given back; and Rome herself, unmoved by the violence of the flood, lay in

dark imperial purples against the western sky.
They all looked silently and hurried on.

When they reached the road, other people had collected who stared in amazement at the strange figures, at the rescued baby. More than one had seen the cradle carried down under the bridge, but had never thought of possible deliverance. Now there were willing feet enough to start off after the cradle, to run in the opposite direction in order to get tidings of what little farm had been swept away. And fortunately one or two carriages had driven out from Rome, the owners of which almost contested the honour of taking the little party back. It was a strange drive. Joy and sorrow at times are almost inextricably interwoven. Phillis, with the baby's dark and curly head pressed tightly against her, sat and looked at Jack, who was, indeed, given back to her from the dead, and all over the broken clouds golden

lights were radiating, and flashing down upon a watery world. The little pools in the road reflected some of the brightness, the roofs were shining, the rain drops gleamed on the trees, it was like enchantment, so suddenly had all this opal light grown out of the gloom. And yet, not so far away, a mother was running wildly by the river, crying out for her lost baby ; and, far down, men, with long poles trying to snatch some of his spoil from Tiber, touched a black and floating object, and let it go with a push—‘only a dog,’ was what they said, ‘and dead.’

Two nights afterwards some of those who had been dining at the table-d’hôte went out into the Piazza di Spagna. There was an eclipse, or something which gave them the excuse for coming into the solemn and wonderful darkness, lit by tremulous stars, and musical with the constant cool splash of the fountain. Carriages were flying backwards

and forwards, people lounging about, but they did not interfere much with the beauty or the quiet. The group of friends broke into little knots, two stood a little way up the Spanish steps, and leaned against the parapet. One of them, a man, was saying :—

‘ Do not be afraid. These disappointments may sadden, but they do not wreck our lives. You have given me memories to cherish for ever, although this is a good-bye we are saying ; yes, goodbye, and God bless you, my dear. Susan and I are going off to-morrow ; there is south Italy to see, it would never do for us, you know, to go home and to have nothing to report of Vesuvius and Pompeii.’

She was crying softly, she felt the kind pressure of his hand, she did not know that he had moved away because another figure was running up the steps.

‘ *Phillis!*’ said Jack in a low voice.

And then she turned and laid her head upon his shoulder.

‘Oh, it is hard, hard !’ she said. ‘Jack, must there always be pain with one’s deepest happiness !’

He did not quite understand, but perhaps he guessed enough, and he was very gentle with her. For indeed it seemed as if the joy of their life had come to them through death and sorrow of heart. Is it not so often ? Will it not be so to the very end ?

Presently he began to talk about the baby ; the mother had been found the very day of the flood, and had walked and run all the way into Rome, almost mad with the bliss of the tidings. And Jack had been out to the spot where the little farm had stood, and had seen all the desolation and ruin, and was going to make his thankoffering and Phillis’s, take the form of a new building. Over the

door there would be carved the figure of a dog, with a date.

Before this was done there were two weddings in Rome. Bice and young Count Moroni were married first, and two or three days after, Phillis Grey and John Ibbetson. It was one of those bright Easter days when Rome breaks into delicious harmonies of spring ; when the banksea roses fling themselves over the walls like foam, and delicate plants spring out of the mighty brickwork, and the sky is one unbroken depth of blue, and the sun shines on the fountain of Trevi, on the falling waters which came rushing out, on the pigeons which fly backwards and forwards, and perch themselves on Neptune's head. The wedding was very quiet. Scarcely half a dozen people were in the Church, and in an hour or two Jack and Phillis were to start for Florence on their way to Venice. But before this Phillis had a

wish which naturally was to be gratified. They must drive to the Ponte Molle and see the spot where Cartouche had died for his master.

On their way Jack put into her hands a letter from his uncle, written with some triumph, but little cordiality.

‘Oliver Trent!’ repeated Phillis, as she came to a sentence with his name.

‘Oliver Thornton, perhaps, one of these days,’ said Jack, folding the letter and putting it back in his pocket. ‘Who knows? I’m sure I don’t. But if so, I hope Hether-ton will disagree with him.’

Phillis, who rather disliked the name of Hether-ton, said quickly:—

‘We will not begrudge it to him.’

‘Yes, I shall,’ persisted Jack, ‘because I object to successful villainy, and to being dis-appointed of my moral.’ But seeing that Phillis looked at him wistfully, he drew

her closer to him. ‘My darling, do you suppose Hetherton seems anything to me now?’

They had not much time to spare, and walked quickly from the bridge along the river side. So changed was it from that other day, that it might, so Phillis thought, have been another stream. Instead of wild anger there was only a stately sweep in the slowly moving water, and though some marks of past turbulence might be here and there visible on the banks, they were not many, and under the warm sun all the green bordering was springing into glad life once more.

But, though where it had been was now dry land, the little bank was gone. Phillis grew pale and clung to Jack when she saw this, she could not speak except by that mute gesture, and he answered it mutely, too. For there where Cartouche had died and he

had been given back to life and her, he kissed his wife, and held her in his arms.

Do people forget as quickly as we commonly believe? Outward marks and signs of remembrance die away, it is true, others fill the vacant places, and we look into smiling faces and say 'he or she is forgotten —it is the way of the world.' But, after all, what do we know? Do not our own memories often startle us? At all sorts of strange times, with a silent foot-fall inaudible to any but ourselves, they come warm, and strong, and living. We do not forget so easily, nor perhaps shall we be forgotten so soon as we all think. God gave good gifts to this husband and wife, and the crown of happy love, but both of them remembered and kept their memories sacred in their hearts. And a peasant woman in a southern country has taught her children to love animals and be good to them, for one of them, she says, was

once saved by a dog. The children listen, thrilled by the familiar story. '*Eccolo!*' cries a girl, pointing, and they all turn and look up where, over the door, is the carved figure of a dog, with a date.

THE END.

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